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SOUTH AFRICA

PLAYBOY



20 QUESTIONS
WITH DAREDEVIL'S CHARLIE COX

HOT DAM
CHANGING ORAL SEX!

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ON LINDSEY PELAS
THE WORLD'S SOCIAL-MEDIA SIREN

A VERY 80s SCANDAL
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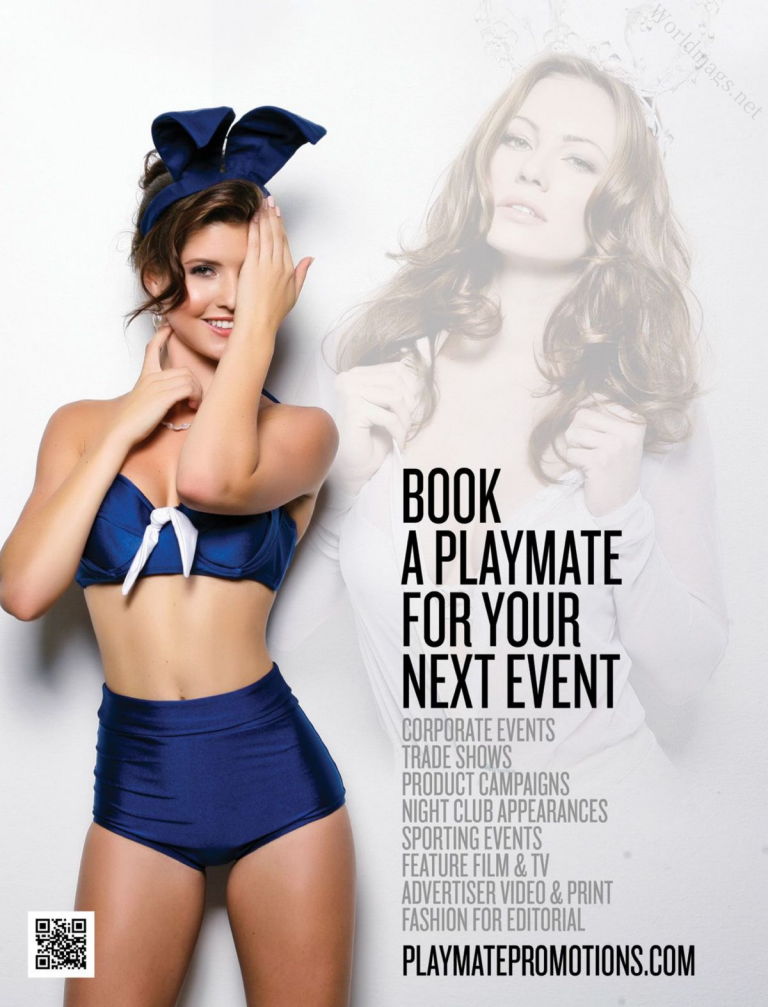
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Jedidiah Jenkins
We've all dreamed of escaping our lives. Jenkins actually did, quitting his day job for a bi-hemisphere bike ride and chronicling it for his devoted Instagram followers. In Far From Home for the Holidays, Jenkins (whose father, Peter Jenkins, penned the 1979 travel tome A Walk Across America) ruminates on northern rituals from the bottom of the world.



Chris Deacon
After landing at PLAYBOY in 2015 by way of London and Time Out New York, Deacon promptly put his stamp on our pages with instant classic layouts not unlike the vintage posters that inspired his foray into design. As creative director, he ushered in 2017's return to nudity with grace and a fresh dose of fun at a time when America desperately needed it.



Madison Margolin
With Rebirth in Bethlehem, Margolin, a writer specializing in Judaism and spirituality ("Jews and drugs," as she puts it), returns to a region where she once lived. Exploring the role of PTSD in Israeli and Palestinian narratives, in a part of the world known for political friction, she sees the issue as a "human, psychological and emotional conflict."



Brin-Jonathan Butler
In American Chess Masters, a s urvey of the tormented prodigies behind the world's most strategic parlor game, Butler contextualizes the significance of 26-year-old Fabiano Caruana and his role in this fall's world championship. The highly respected sports writer's book The Grandmaster drops November 6 from Simon & Schuster.

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No 76 November 2018


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FOR ONE AND ALL

I'm a bisexual woman who has been enjoying a PLAYBOY subscription since the Amazon Prime series about Hugh Hefner, American PLAYBOY, came out last April. I tend to prefer plus-size women like Ashley Graham and Stefania Ferrario but never saw similarly voluptuous models in your pages - until the September/October issue. Jocelyn Corona is the most breathtaking woman I've ever seen! The instant I came across her pictorial (La Reina), my heart started beating faster. I'm glad my favorite magazine is becoming more inclusive. I love that instead of "Entertainment for Men" PLAYBOY now proclaims to be "Entertainment for All"! Keep up the good work — and please continue to feature full-figured women.

Jennie Watters



All hail the queen: Jocelyn Corona.

BROWN BAGGING IT?

Thank you for the fantastic pictorials and for keeping me up on the latest trends. You've always stated you're a trendsetter and a step ahead of the curve. You must be; you changed the world. How about another change that will help our world? What would it take to get rid of the plastic cover on your magazine? National Geographic now uses paper. Will you step up again as a leader and do the same? We have only one blue planet to call home, and we must work to protect it.

Gregg Jurgens

Great question, Gregg. Paper mailers would be a return to our roots: Once upon a time, subscribers received their copies in modest brownpaper envelopes. We're in discussions with our printer and distributor about the possibility of reviving this practice. Stay tuned.

GROW YOUR OWN WAY

Josh Tickell's proposal to use regenerative agriculture as a solution to global warming, while promising, depends for its implementation on a sea change in U.S. political forces — one that, at 61, I doubt will happen in my lifetime (Planet Earth Goes to Washington, September/ October). I've become a cynic. Even in "green" Seattle, weeks of smoke-filled skies caused by wildfires have not galvanized the necessary consortiums of environmental, governmental and industry groups to address the poor forestmanagement policies that, combined with climate change, have resulted in forests ripe for burning. If smoke-congested air in the West and catastrophic storms and floods in the East don't get voters' attention, I'm not sure what will. Change happens incrementally, and as long as mainstream American voters of all ages fail to appreciate the need for specific actions to combat climate change, "elegant solutions" such as regenerative agriculture will never be implemented. Millennials must not only vote for progressive candidates but also convince their baby boomer elders to do the same.

Margaret Suman

FANTASY GAME

October Playmate Olga de Mar has a captivating beauty (Game Set Match, September/October). I dream of playing tennis with her.

Joe Zamora

HONOR ROLL

I was happy to see the return of your annual college pictorial (Homecoming, September/ October). And a special thank-you for featuring Miami Dade College beauty Samantha Fernandez. She has an amazing smile! I'd love to see more of her in PLAYBOY.

Erie, Pennsylvania

I'm grateful to the magazine for bringing back the college pictorial. It has been a favorite of mine over the years. It looks like I need to get back and visit Arizona State University soon!

Brian Johnson

WELCOME BACK

Since re-subscribing, I've been amazed at how good the magazine has become. The September/ October edition is no exception. Michael Shannon, Teyana Taylor, campus consent, rhino conservationists, Jonathan Tasini and the models — absolutely stunning from beginning to end. Your photographers are crushing it. I'd been a subscriber since the early 1980s, when I was a translator in the Army, but took a hiatus after I started to build my company. When I saw the newest iteration, I knew it was time to come

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back. Hugh Hefner got me interested; Cooper and the new crew got me back. Thank you

Kristian Niemi

EARLY VOTING

Kirby Griffin gets my vote for 2019 Playmate of the Year (God Bless Americus, September/October). Her smile is captivating. It's great you chose a beautiful, down-to-earth Southern girl.

Walter Sherfey

PREACH, SOFIA

Kudos on the 20Q with Sofia Boutella (September/October). What a terrific combination of creative ability and a strong voice. "Women matter. You need to be a feminist. If you're not, go fuck yourself." Here's hoping PLAYBOY's primarily male readership appreciates her talent and embraces her point of view.

Victor Smith

HOSTESS WITH THE MOSTEST

Kudos on the 20Q with Sofia Boutella (September/October). What a terrific combination of creative ability and a strong voice. "Women matter. You need to be a feminist. If you're not, go fuck yourself." Here's hoping PLAYBOY's primarily male readership appreciates her talent and embraces her point of view.

Victor Smith

HOSTESS WITH THE MOSTEST

Until recently I'd never purchased a PLAYBOY. Now I have two issues on my coffee table. Both contain amazing images from Portuguese photographer Ana Dias. Her work, featured in Lifesaver (July/August) and Game Set Match (September/October) is unique, fun and wholesome—yet incredibly sexy. Please give us more! I'm a middleage, white, heterosexual female executive, and male guests visiting my condo now think I'm extremely cool thanks to my PLAYBOYS.

Sherry Satterwhite



Kathy Griffin is back and louder than ever.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Your joke about Humboldt County police and motorists was reprehensible (Party Jokes, September/October). Were your editors not aware of the tragic bus accident that killed 16 and injured 13 earlier this year in Humboldt, Saskatchewan?

Gordon Robert

Rest assured that we would never make light of such a tragedy. The joke had nothing to do with a crash and was set in a California county, not a Canadian city.

PICTURE-PERFECT

Over the years you've published thousands of photos, some of them superb. One of my favorites appeared in the early 1970s. It's a slick shot of a beautifully shaped breast. The nipple is being gently held between the long-nailed fingers of another woman. I liked the photo so much I cut it out and glued it to the center of my Camaro's steering wheel and covered it with an antique clock's round glass faceplate. It was stunning. The station attendants would come out to see it whenever I got gas. I was famous. My female passengers thought it was hot — and what an icebreaker! That picture was truly unique. I'll never forget it.

Donald Hodgins

Ah, memories. That indelible image was shot by Pete Turner and first appeared in our December 1971 issue on page 137; we've reprinted it several times.

LEUNG'S LINGERIE

Your profile of lingerie designer Yeha Leung was a welcome surprise. So few men's publications celebrate women's lingerie —strange, given that it can be the sexiest thing a woman owns. Sometimes seeing a woman in lingerie is sexier than seeing her nude. The fact that this young designer is turning underclothing into beautiful artwork, and that Hollywood's heavy hitters are taking notice, gives me hope that more men will start paying attention to what they're taking off.

Chadwick Holmes

ENTERTAINMENT FOR MEL

I recently read your article on PLAYBOY appearances in major motion pictures (Our Favorite Cameos, July/August). I was surprised you overlooked a joke involving your publication in Mel Brooks's Robin Hood: Men in Tights. Why didn't that movie make the list?

Greg Gonzalez

Like the character in Brooks's film who fondly caresses the unfurled Centerfold of a Braille (prop) copy of our magazine, we were blind not to see it.

POLYPHONIC SPREE

Keep printing fiction like Madrigal (September/October): many-voiced (like its musical namesake), circular and totally confounding. Reading it made my head spin — in a good way.

Jake Byrnes



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Wearable sex toys? Lorals is rethinking female pleasure.

SEX

Hot Dam

Why the most overlooked prophylactic may finally make a dent in bedrooms across America

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **EVAN WOODS**

Things are getting hot and heavy, and you both stumble toward the bedroom. After getting naked, you start making your way downtown, moving fast. You then sit up and reach for the dental dam on the nightstand. What's that? You don't? Because "What's a dental dam?"

If you're unfamiliar with the unisex prophylactic known as a dental dam, you're among the majority of sexual beings. Dental dams are thin latex squares you place over a vagina or anus during oral sex to prevent STI transmission. They're often packaged in clunky wrappers and manufactured by companies with clinical names such as HandiDam, Crosstex and Trustex. Dams also cost more than condoms and are exponentially harder to buy (good luck finding them at CVS). Overall, despite their intention to make oral sex safer, they end up making it feel like a chore, sending an unfair message to women that they deserve neither safe cunnilingus nor any version of it.

BY **SOFIA BARRETT-IB ARRIA**

"Stretching a piece of rubber over someone's private parts is not aesthetically pleasing," says Dr. Damian Jacob Sendler, a New York–based clinical sexologist. "There has never been a serious campaign promoting the use of dams for people who enjoy oral sex."

Therein lies the problem. National rates of STIs are reaching record highs, yet culturally, safe sex has remained synonymous with condoms, which are deeply entrenched in our consumer consciousness thanks to their ubiquity, affordability and chic brand names such as Skyn and Trojan. In fact, Research and Markets estimates that by 2021 the global condom market will be worth nearly $10 billion. "But

when it comes to the dental dam, everybody thinks of them as a laughingstock and incredibly unsexy," says Melanie Cristol, founder of Lorals, a brand she hopes will modernize the dental dam industry.

Dams' limited use can be traced to the fact that they weren't intended for oral sex. The first dental dam was invented by dentist Sanford Barnum in 1864 as a tool for isolating a tooth from the rest of the oral cavity. It was only during the HIV epidemic of the 1980s that we co-opted dams for safer sex.

Cristol says her early experiences with dental dams were disappointing — that is, when she could track one down. Their sale is limited almost exclusively to sex-toy stores, Planned Parenthood clinics and online retailers. Even then, they can be a hard sell to a new partner. According to a 2010 study published in the journal Sexual Health, only 10 percent of queer women have ever used a dam, and only two percent use them regularly. "It moves up and down on the body. It can go up your nose and into your mouth. It's hard to breathe. You can choke on it," Cristol says. "It really detracts from the experience."

Thus the inspiration behind Cristol's Lorals, a line of lingerie-like latex designed to be worn during oral sex. Cut like panties and manufactured from FDA-approved materials, Lorals is just one tangible example of a growing trend of enterprising, sex-positive women looking to reclaim female pleasure in the bedroom. For Cristol, that meant reengineering the dam to resemble a bedroom staple that prioritizes not only women's sex lives but also their health. "There wasn't a product out there that looked at women's bodies and tried to figure out the best way to create an STD-prevention device for cunnilingus and rimming," she says. "I just set off on this quest to try to figure out how to make a better version."

As it awaits approval from the FDA to market Lorals as an STI-prevention method, the company currently sells its panties as a wearable sex toy. That's notable because, though blow jobs are commonplace in most heterosexual relationships, studies indicate that more than a third of women need direct clitoral stimulation — like the kind received during oral sex — to reach orgasm. Culturally, cunnilingus is still considered a bedroom novelty. One goal of Lorals is to motivate men to consider cunnilingus as often as they expect a blow job. Of course, it will take more than Lorals or

DAM — another reimagining of the prophylactic (see Can You Engineer Good Oral?, right) — to convince men as well as women to go down on their partners with dam in hand. Enter the women of O.school. Founded by San Francisco–based entrepreneur Andrea Barrica in November 2017, O.school aims to educate people of all backgrounds and sexualities via live streaming and female instructors who are primarily queer and women of color. As O.school's Kenna Cook told Glamour before the site's launch, "When I talk about dental dams, it's usually the first time people have seen one. We have almost never been shown barrier protection negotiations before oral sex in any media. I think men — and women — don't want to look inexperienced."

More than a third of women need direct clitoral stimulation to orgasm.

Similarly, Barrica tells PLAYBOY, "When you reconnect someone to their body, their life changes. They know what they want."

Media adoption, especially in porn, may help. Sexologist Chris Donaghue, author of Sex Outside the Lines, suggests, "Dental dams need to become eroticized to be used more often. Most men still learn about sexuality from porn, which doesn't show the use of dental dams." As with all new experiences tied to sex and sexuality, the answer begins with education and exploration. But even with an enthusiastic partner, internalized shame about the way their vaginas look, smell or taste makes some women hesitant to receive oral sex. In a survey of her customers, Cristol found that "four out of five women had declined oral sex when they wanted it, not just because of STDs but because sometimes, early in a relationship, it feels too intimate, or because they weren't in the right head space to participate."

In the end, the dental dam renaissance isn't just a push to correct the product's design flaws and make a buck in the process. It's a case of women creating more avenues for safe, mutual pleasure. "Women do crave oral sex. It's a gift you're receiving from your partner. For those few minutes, or many minutes, it's all about you and about your pleasure," Cristol says. "We're opening up this option of amazing oral sex for women, whenever they want it, wherever they want it." ■

CAN YOU ENGINEER GOOD ORAL?

As a product-design student at New York's Parsons the New School of Design, **Joya Widney** has f ocused h er t hesis w ork o n reimagining sex toys from a queer perspective. Here, the budding designer and selfbilled dental dam historian tells PLAYBOY about DAM, her pleasure-minded vision for the prophylactic and why she thinks it has been ignored for so long.

Your adolescent experience with sex education focused mostly on condom use. In fact, you didn't discover dental dams until college. How did that impact your sexuality? We're socialized to think that without a penis, there can't be sex. As a queer woman, safer sex was never something I had to think about. For people who can't get pregnant, it seems like sex can be riskless. Realizing I could get an STI involved unlearning heterosexual perceptions of what counts as "sex." It's not just straight people who laugh about dental dams; queer people laugh about them too.

You can't go deep during oral if you're holding a piece of latex over a vagina. How will DAM, which has yet to be manufactured, theoretically make up for this? One of the biggest issues with dental dams is that while incredibly thin, they don't translate the intimate texture of a tongue. It's generalized pressure. You don't really feel like it's licking. And there's no plastic in existence, I believe, that will ever allow for that. So it made more sense to add to the dam versus trying to make it thinner. DAM has an indent for users to stick their tongue in so they have more range of motion, and my dental dam is covered on the interior with a texture similar to a tongue's. The harness is also designed so the dental dam hugs the body.

Explain the purpose of a harness. The dam needed to be wearable — something that would fit all body types, that would move with the body in the ways you're used to — to truly be pleasurable.

You also departed from latex, opting to design DAM as silicone-based. Why? By using plastic we have a dam that's sanitizeable and reusable, making it more costeffective. Also, silicone is hypoallergenic. There's no real alternative on the market

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Talk to Me

Three years after becoming the world's social-media siren, **Lindsey Pelas** is flipping the script

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BY **STEVEN LECKART**

The private jet was on fire, and Lindsey Pelas felt certain she was going to die. It was 2015, and she was flying to Los Angeles from Colorado with Dan Bilzerian, the brawny "King of Instagram" who'd helped her go viral the year before. After meeting her at the Playboy Mansion (she'd appeared on our Playboy Plus website in 2014), Bilzerian had produced a slow-motion video of Pelas jogging in a drastically undersized tank top. It garnered more than 10 million YouTube views and catapulted her from bartending to cashing in on Instagram, where she now has 7.7 million followers, and eventually led to her own highly rated podcast — but first let's return to the burning jet.

It was accelerating down the runway when the brakes caught fire.

"The pilot was like, *'Everybody off the plane!'* " recalls Pelas. The aircraft screeched to a halt and the passengers made it out unharmed, but the trauma lingered. "It's the most horrifying thing when you think you might actually die," she says.

Now 27, Pelas would never have predicted she'd end up on a private jet, let alone nearly perish aboard one. She grew up in backwoods Loranger, Louisiana and was raised by a "super redneck" mom and a dad who has lost at least one boat to a hurricane. In grade school she weaned herself off the regional twang by mimicking the characters on *Barney & Friends*. As a sassy teenager voted "most ambitious" in high school, she landed an academic college scholarship, and when she transferred to Louisiana State University to pursue a history degree, Pelas supported herself with a fulltime job at Hooters.

"Customers are mean because you're pretty, and they're mean because they think you're there to be their slave," she says. "Someone called me a slut to my face, and my general manager literally threw him out. I was like, 'Oh, I finally got one!' "

Other stories from that period don't end as well. While at LSU, Pelas was assaulted in a bar. "A guy grabbed underneath my skirt," she says. "He grabbed me — I mean grabbed me on my vagina, enough to be like, Oh my God. I was like, 'What the fuck are you doing?' The guy acted like, 'Oh yeah, just did that.' " When she went to security, one of the bouncers replied, "Well, are you over it?" She left sobbing and with a migraine. The intensity of the assault, paired with the callous response —"the good-old-boy system," she calls it—still infuriates and dumbfounds her.

Nevertheless, Pelas refused to change how she presents herself. She's a proud and increasingly vocal feminist, even though she's often accused of reinforcing certain obvious if outdated stereotypes.

"A lot of people would say, 'You being sexy all the time is contributing to this idea that that's your only value.' I really deeply thought about that — am I a hypocrite?" She goes on: "To be honest, I truly love to feel like a peacock flaunting my feathers. And I don't think that asks for me to be demeaned."

There's something undeniably genuine about the way she works complex feelings into a clear feminist stance. She exudes a sticksand-stones realness, and her no-nonsense poise suggests a lifestyle that has evolved since her flaming-jet days. (She's currently more interested in lying low, working and hitting the gym.) Over a two-hour conversation she barely breaks eye contact to check her phone. For all her magnetism, Pelas is a great listener, so it follows that she's a natural-born interviewer.

Eyes Up Here, the podcast Pelas launched this past spring, showcases the same sharp wit she deploys on Twitter. If it seems ironic that a woman who became famous for her breathtaking appearance would choose a nonvisual medium, well, that's the point. It's right there in the title.

During lively interviews with models, actresses and internet entrepreneurs, Pelas frequently asks guests to share their own experiences combating sexism. They seldom surprise her — they're too close to her own — but after years of facing catcallers, trolls and worse, she maintains an open heart.

"The internet has become such an easy place to be evil and mean," she says, "but it's also a place where people who didn't have a voice get to share their stories." Pelas pauses, summoning a conclusion that, like her decision to start a podcast, is nicely counterintuitive. "I feel like the most beautiful part of the internet is learning to treat each other better." ■



"To be honest, I love to feel like a peacock flaunting my feathers."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHRISTOPHER VON STEINBACH**



Olga LOERA

Photography by: **MIKE PRADO @MIKEPRADOPICTURE** *MUA:* **JAZELLE MORALES @JAZELLE_MAKEUPARTIST**
Fashion Designer: **APRIL BLACK DIAMONDS @APRILBLACKDIAMOND**
Fashion Style: **ARMANDO HERNANDEZ @MR._HERNANDEZ3**
Text by **NELLY MADUNA**

Describe yourself in three words?
Passionate, persistent and a fighter.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Yes. It's such an honour to be able to express myself through this amazing platform.

What was it like starting out as a model?
You will find that preparing yourself is the best thing you can do in order to achieve the goals you set out to. It is like anything in life and in any career. If you were to apply for a position in an art gallery, you would have to have knowledge and a love for art, and if you were to apply for a hair dressing position, you would not go to your interview with bad hair. Looking the part is very important, but also having the right attitude will go a long way to ensure you get noticed by the right people.

Describe your perfect day off when you are not modelling?
Wake up in the morning and go for my daily run and workout, and spend time with my loved ones.

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
I consider myself a country girl since I grew up around a big farm owned by my grandparents living and enjoying the simple things offered by nature.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
One of my top favourite cities is Melbourne. I love its hidden spaces, iconic laneways and electric nightlife.

Do you have a secret talent?
I'm really good with fashion styling and designs, and I really love the creative process of it all.

A guilty pleasure?
Food, tequila, and coffee in the morning! Also, I can eat sweet potato all day every day, and obviously Mexican food.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
Love. To me love means finding someone that brings out the best version yourself and challenges you to be better.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart, to my family and every single one of my fans for all their unconditional love and support.








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AMERICAN CHESS MASTERS
AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY

A gallery of greatness and madness—and a millennial master who just might break the cycle

BY **BRIN-JONATHAN BUTLER** ILLUSTRATION BY **NATHAN GELGUD**

This November, an American will have a shot at becoming the undisputed world chess champion — the first such opportunity since Bobby Fischer captured the world's imagination in 1972. Fabiano Caruana, 26 years old and currently the world's second-highest-rated player, will face 27-year-old Norwegian Magnus Carlsen, reigning world champion and the highest-rated player in history. Caruana has the chance to step out from under the long, dark shadow cast by Fischer and other tormented geniuses of American chess. Join us as we profile Caruana and five others, weaving a tale of prodigious talent and unchecked obsession.



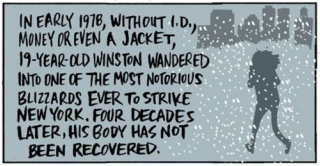
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"BOY GENIUS" PROCLAIMED THE COVER OF THE DECEMBER 19, 1964 ISSUE OF THE *SATURDAY EVENING POST*. THE STORY'S SUBJECT WAS FIRST-GRADE MATHEMATICS PRODIGY PETER WINSTON, WHO AT THE TIME HAD NOT YET ENCOUNTERED A CHESSBOARD.



TWO YEARS LATER, WINSTON WAS REPORTEDLY DIAGNOSED AS SCHIZOPHRENIC; THE MEDICATION HE WAS PRESCRIBED SEVERELY HAMPERED HIS CHESS GAME.



BACK IN 1988, NEW YORKER JOSH WAITZKIN WAS AN 11-YEAR-OLD CHESS PHENOMENON FREQUENTLY TOUTED AS THE NEXT BOBBY FISCHER. THE TOP PLAYER FOR HIS AGE IN AMERICA, HE BECAME ONE OF TWO KIDS TO EARN A DRAW AGAINST WORLD CHAMPION GARRY KASPAROV IN AN EXHIBITION GAME. IN HIS DEFENSE, KASPAROV WAS SIMULTANEOUSLY BATTLING 58 OTHER YOUNG PLAYERS.



WAITZKIN DID NOT BECOME THE NEXT FISCHER AND ABANDONED COMPETITIVE CHESS BY THE CLOSE OF THE 20TH CENTURY. HOWEVER, WAITZKIN'S FATHER WROTE A BOOK ABOUT THEIR FATHER-SON JOURNEY INTO THE CHESS WORLD. *SEARCHING FOR BOBBY FISCHER* BECAME A BEST-SELLER AND THEN A CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED FILM.





WAITZKIN WOULD LATER FIND SUCCESS IN PUBLISHING AND AS A MARTIAL ARTIST, WINNING A WORLD TITLE IN TAI CHI PUSH HANDS—AND AVOIDING FISCHER'S DARK LEGACY.

AT THE AGE OF FOUR, FABIANO CARUANA MOVED FROM MIAMI TO BROOKLYN AND TOOK UP CHESS AT HIS SYNAGOGUE'S AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM, A MILE AWAY FROM WHERE FISCHER HAD LEARNED THE GAME IN HIS MOTHER'S APARTMENT.



STARTING WHEN HE WAS FIVE, CARUANA DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO CHESS, BECOMING THE YOUNGEST AMERICAN GRANDMASTER BY THE TIME HE WAS 14.

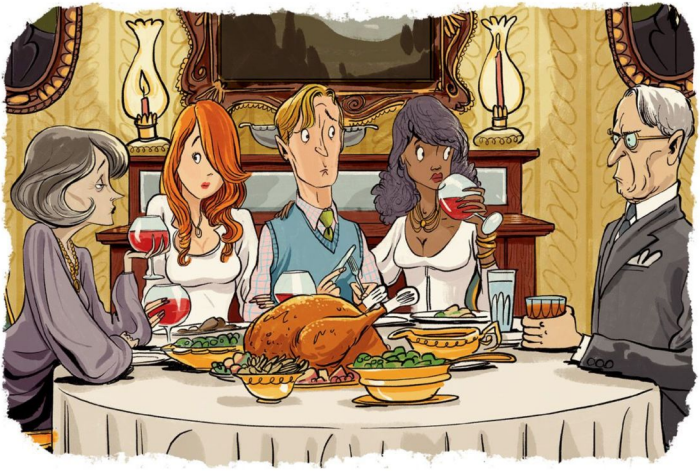
FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE FISCHER GAINED GLOBAL ATTENTION, A U.S. GRANDMASTER IS FIGHTING TO BECOME THE UNDISPUTED WORLD CHESS CHAMPION. CARUANA, CURRENTLY NUMBER TWO IN THE WORLD AND THE TOP AMERICAN GRANDMASTER, WILL PLAY FOR THE GAME'S MOST COVETED PRIZE AGAINST THE REIGNING WORLD CHAMPION, MAGNUS CARLSEN OF NORWAY, IN A 12-GAME MATCH IN LONDON IN NOVEMBER. BEYOND THE SEVEN-FIGURE PURSE AND WORLD TITLE, CARUANA IS PERHAPS ALSO FIGHTING TO BREAK FREE FROM THE LONG SHADOW OF BOBBY FISCHER AND THE REST OF HIS TORMENTED FOREBEARS.



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Playboy Advisor

Sex columnist **Anna del Gaizo** coaches a man who wants to modernize the concept of bringing someone home for the holidays; plus, advice on role-playing, popping cherries and planting seeds



Q: ***I'm in a polyamorous relationship with two women. This year will be the first time we're together for the holidays, but I have no game plan for introducing them to my relatives. I love both women and don't want to have to choose between them. Is this the right time to introduce my lifestyle to my family, or should I ask my lovers to decide?—C.O., Kenosha***

ILLUSTRATION BY **ZOHAR LAZAR**

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A: The holidays can be challenging to begin with. Between last-minute shopping, office parties and their accompanying hangovers, and familial obligations, the notion of adding not one but two significant others to the mix is enough to make most people skip the mistletoe and jet off to a remote locale until January 2. Props to you for wanting to make everyone happy during the year's most stressful season, but when we try to please everyone we often end up pleasing no one — particularly ourselves.

A festive family reunion is never the right time to deliver dramatic and potentially heartbreaking revelations. I'm of the attitude that people who judge what you do in your own bedroom should suck it, but I have to ask: How open-minded is your family?

If you truly deem this to be the ideal occasion to give your nearest and dearest the unexpected gift of two Santa babies on your arms, be prepared to explain to them everything polyamory encompasses: the capacity to be in love with more than one person at a time and the practice of consensual, ethical nonmonogamy. Also explain what it isn't. (You're not a recent Mormon convert, right?) Expect some ire from your less progressive relatives as they dig into the green bean casserole, and at least one crass joke from your drunken uncle. But first, are you certain both your lovers want to meet your family? They may have already made plans to spend the holidays with their own relatives — or with each other.

Q: *My boyfriend likes to role-play but not in the way you might imagine. When we're having sex he'll say things like "Tell me you want to be my wife. Tell me you want to have my baby." He never says anything similar outside the bedroom. I assume he gets off on "dirty talk" that suggests we're bonded for life. In reality I'm on birth control, so there's a fantasy element at play here. How seriously should I take his remarks about marriage while we're having sex? He's messing with my emotions.—R.G., Winnipeg*

A: Monogamy and procreation: How novel! This fantasy is tame — innocent, even — and based on an old-fashioned notion, which is what makes it subversive. It's so pure that it seems twisted. If these lofty sentiments were coming from the mouth of a man who wasn't your potential baby daddy, you could have some fun: Gush about the immortal union you're creating with your adoring husband-tobe; whisper every sweet nothing he coaxes out of your quivering lips.

Unfortunately, he's your actual boyfriend, so you have to take this relatively seriously. How do you react in the moment? If your knee-jerk response has been to play along, moaning, "Oh yes, I want to be your wife! Let's make a baby!" it's safe to say he assumes you're into this scenario too. If you're stone-faced and tight-lipped, your boyfriend is more oblivious than most.

Which brings me to the real question: What do you want out of this relationship? If it's a proposal and two and a half kids, you must ask him, "What's the deal? Do you actually want to marry me, or is this just a fantasy?" A postcoital cuddle is as good a time as any to tell him what you've told me: He's messing with your emotions. Otherwise, it may be time to introduce some of your own surprise role-playing: Tell him your birth control failed and you're pregnant. Trust me, your answer will be in his reaction.

Q: *I've had a bukkake fantasy ever since I discovered porn. I want to act on it, but I'm completely clueless about how to find such an orgy or set one up. Any advice?—R.U.,*

A: Ah, the polarizing practice of a group of men standing in a circle and masturbating until they all climax on a willing recipient who gleefully submits to load after load. Talk about being thirsty, right? Bukkake originated in the 1986 Japanese porn film Mascot Note; the word translates to "the act of splashing." Regarded as a fetish by most and a degrading practice by many, it remains a niche practice. While sex parties have infiltrated the mainstream, bukkake parties are still on the periphery, with a mere 4,300 videos on Pornhub in the bukkake category. (For reference, the porn site received more than 4million total uploads last year.) Even so, there's no reason you shouldn't be able to find at least a few cohorts with the same zeal for collective coming — though you may have to travel a bit from New Haven.

Dive into online bukkake forums. (Many advise men to drink blackberry juice in advance to ensure their semen tastes sweet.) These hubs offer chat rooms for connecting with other semen enthusiasts. Research local swingers parties and consider attending a high-end sex party such as Killing Kittens, Snctm or NSFW, where you can meet potential attendees for a future event should you ever choose to host one. If you haven't already, get a facial from an eager partner. (All the better if he holds off on masturbating for three days ahead of time, which will result in a much larger load.) Then do the same in a threesome, which is easier to orchestrate than an orgy. Fantasies often deviate from reality. In the end, a second serving may be just enough to satisfy your sexual appetite.

Q: *When is it okay to start fucking someone without a condom? I've been dating a woman for two months. She's on the pill, and we've shown each other our STD test results — but she still won't engage in bareback sex. It's frustrating enough that I'm thinking of ending things.—G.M., Encino,*

A: I empathize with your frustration, but I applaud you for taking the responsible route. If she's a rational person, she probably doesn't fear pregnancy. Rather, she may know that STD rates in the United States have reached record highs for the fourth consecutive year. Cases of gonorrhea increased 67 percent between 2013 and 2017, and cases of syphilis increased 76 percent over the same period.

So not wanting to go bareback may relate to whether she believes you're truly exclusive. Other possibilities: She has a condom fetish. She's a germophobe. She thinks the penis is gross and doesn't want it touching her vagina. None of these are common in my experience, but anything's possible. Ultimately, if she's not communicating what bothers her about bareback, it may be time to throw in the rubber.

Q: *I'm dating a 35-year-old virgin. He's a Christian and recognizes he has deepseated issues because of his religious upbringing. I like him, but sex is really important to me. How do I do this?—R.S., Marengo*

A: It's one thing to go without sex for a long time when you're single; it's another entirely when you're in a relationship, especially when dopamine is coursing through your brain. There's a lot to be said for getting to know someone — even falling in love — before getting into bed, and delayed gratification can make the eventual release all the more intense. But how delayed are we talking?

Like most cautious customers, I like to testdrive a car before buying. What if it doesn't ride smoothly or, worse, the stick shift is too small? Your concerns are natural. Sex should be important to everyone. You can have all the intellectual chemistry in the world, but if you don't know how to fuck each other, you're screwed.

But by all means, give him a chance. How often do we meet someone we really like? He seems to be comfortable opening up about his issues. If you fall for each other and you end up popping his cherry, you might find yourself having the most mind-blowing sex of your life.

Or not. You can't predict, so instead, decide how long you're willing to wait. In the meantime, treat yourself to a new dildo. Knowing you have one may be just the thing that finally gets him off.

REBIRTH IN BETHLEHEM

How does one attain peace in a land of ubiquitous trauma? Inside the growing bilateral movement to bring healing to Israel-Palestine

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ADLAN MANSRI**



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BY MADISON MARGOLIN

I'm in the passenger seat of a sedan cruising the highway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, passing dry hills, minarets and wire fencing beneath Palestinian villages looming over the road. "Sometimes they throw rocks at the cars," Oren Lebovitch tells me as I try to catch a glimpse of the West Bank barrier, a wall that currently spans more than 400 miles. The chairman of Ale Yarok ("Green Leaf"), Israel's cannabis- legalization party, Lebovitch assures me we'll arrive safely at the Knesset, Israel's parliament, which is about to hold a hearing on decriminalization. Posttraumatic stress disorder among the populace is one of many reasons Lebovitch is pushing to get weed legalized.

Cannabis has been therapeutic for many of Israel's 8.5 million citizens — Palestinians too, though in lower numbers. In the past year, 27 percent of Israelis have smoked pot, while nearly 35,000 legally receive medical marijuana. Others smoke hashish or resort to the Russian roulette of opioids to cope with life in an intermittent war zone.

"Some wake up in the middle of the night with nightmares, sweating, even wetting their beds," says Lebovitch. "They can't sleep for more than three hours and get hooked on prescription pills. Every Independence Day, they ask the public not to use firecrackers because it scares them. PTSD was not talked about for years; only lately do they dare to speak out. I think cannabis was one reason for that."

Approaching Jerusalem, Lebovitch fumbles with the radio. News updates interrupt programming on the hour, a lingering wartime convention. It has been relatively quiet this June, save for the times Gaza's sole power plant ran out of fuel, causing dayslong outages. (Israel controls Palestinian access to water, gasoline, imports and international travel.)

Almost every Jew, Christian and Muslim in the region knows someone who has suffered under the conflict. Rampant trauma inevitably informs both Israeli and Palestinian narratives, from policy to daily life. For peace to become viable, the conflict's victims desperately need new methods to address their pain amid the region's stubborn and blood-stained politics.

• • •

A few days after visiting the Knesset (which, to Lebovitch's dismay, will eventually pass a tepid decriminalization policy), I hop a bus at Damascus Gate, outside Jerusalem's Old City. I'm going to visit Antwan Saca, an activist working to raise awareness around PTSD and the ways it afflicts soldiers and civilians on both sides of the wall. I naively offer the driver my Rav-Kav, or Israeli bus pass. He chuckles and waves his hand, so I drop him some shekels instead. You can use Israeli currency in Palestine, but not your Rav-Kav to board a Palestinian bus.

It's a half-hour ride, past black-hat Hasidim, bare-legged joggers and much in between, to the Bethlehem checkpoint. I sail through the near-empty maze of cement —it's more complicated to get out of Palestine than to get in — and imagine what it must be like at rush hour. On a typical day hundreds of Palestinians line up here between two and eight AM. This is, Saca later tells me, one of the few exits serving a region with a population of 600,000. People unbuckle their belts at security scanners. Israel Defense Forces guard every corner.

On the other side, men hang out on the street, drinking tea and playing board games. The sidewalk is crude; weeds poke out around the alleyways. I peruse a bodega, where the Israeli brands I'm used to are mostly absent, and wait for Saca, who promptly pulls up in a rusty silver Ford Focus. A 34-year-old Palestinian Christian with a grizzly beard and kind eyes, he looks like a teddy bear despite his T-shirt, which reads WARRIOR.

We pass the wall, rife with graffiti and murals, and drive through the meandering Old City of Bethlehem. A large black cross looms over the single-lane road. Smooth, sandcolored stone adorns the walls of connected homes, shops and offices. He leads me to a rooftop café and orders tea.

"Welcome to the Holy Land," Saca says. "All of us come with deep, inherited trauma. A healing process is needed." At the time of our interview, he is serving as director of programs for Holy Land Trust, a nongovernmental organization that helps Palestinians explore their identity and personal experiences. A few months later he'll quit, turning toward conciliatory therapies for both Palestinians and Israelis.

Such has been the passion of a young Israeli-Palestinian generation looking to confront the psychic impact of the region's religious warfare and identity politics. Employing cannabis and psychedelics, art and dialogue, they hope to heal those who will inherit these lands and, in doing so, heal the region.

"To be free means freedom from traumatic experiences, healing from the pain of consistent, existential threat," Saca says. Working through psychological damage — from a place of empowerment, not victimhood — could allow Israelis and Palestinians to achieve a peace that responds to the needs of both sides, he suggests. "If that isn't realized, through nonviolent activism, then we're only creating a bubble."

Most discourse around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict follows the same political divisions and tired headlines that do little but cause further polarization. Saca's vision is simply that the peace process must address trauma in order to succeed. But as compelling as his case may be, the question remains: Can drugs and therapy come anywhere near the power of tanks and rockets?

• • •

If you can take one commonality from the region's vast and tangled past, it's that Israelis and Palestinians both suffer from generations of dehumanization. The Jewish story revolves around issues of security, anti- Semitism and persecution in European and Arab lands; for



Opposite: A view of Jerusalem's Old City. **Above:** Pedestrians stroll past the Israeli security barrier in Bethlehem.

Palestine, it's a history of displacement and erasure of national identity.

Three decades after the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which supported transferring rule of Palestine from the Ottomans to the Brits in order to provide a Jewish homeland, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181 to create two states, effectively ending the British Mandate. As told in the composite text *Side by Side: Parallel Histories of Israel- Palestine,* "Arab attacks on Jewish residents began the next morning, as the Arabs did not accept the partition plan," while "this was in fact the start of the countdown for the establishment of the State Israel on 15 May 1948 and the 1948 Nakbah ['Catastrophe'], which uprooted and dispersed the Palestinian people."

The Oslo Accords process, a series of negotiations in the 1990s, is typically seen as the attempt that came closest to achieving peace and agreed-upon borders — and has been undermined by extremism and distrust on both sides, including increases in terrorism and continued settlement in the West Bank. The security barrier, the checkpoints, the Second Intifada (a Palestinian uprising marked by suicide bombings met with Israeli military aggression) and a hard-right swing in the Israeli
government were products of Oslo's failure.

"The generation before me had a different vision of peace," Saca says. "They used to encounter each other on a daily basis." But the ensuing physical and psychological separation has only hardened Israeli and Palestinian estrangement. Post-Oslo, Hamas rose to power, and peace ideals dissolved into cynicism and violence.

Trauma is a daily part of life here, the result of harrowing tragedies and micro-episodes alike. Gaza has its electrical outages, Israel its Red Alert app notifications whenever rockets are launched into its airspace. The sight of army tanks, uniformed personnel and drones can all act as triggers, says Saca. So too can the sound of a balloon popping, which caused an Israeli acquaintance to dive to the floor in a Tel Aviv mall.

The numbers around PTSD in the region can be surprisingly low considering the vast swaths of Israeli and Palestinian populations exposed to violence or the threat thereof. Suicide, not war, has been the primary cause of death within the Israel Defense Forces. Meanwhile, 40 percent of children from towns such as Sderot, on the Gaza border, suffer from PTSD, and in Gaza, up to 92 percent of teens might
display symptoms during wartime. According to a study based on biographical sketches of 50 suicide attackers, 44 had grievances resulting from IDF operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The condition is more likely to be exploited than treated. "PTSD develops on an individual level with fear memories that can be manipulated by politicians to promote their agendas," explains Yoav Litvin, an Israeli American writer, photographer and doctor of psychology and behavioral science. The region's politics reflect and nurture PTSD, magnifying the existential threat inherent in the Israeli and Palestinian narratives.



Fear also strengthens the brain's left side, which then inhibits the right side from noticing the details that could mitigate fear, Litvin adds. The left side tells you an owl and an eagle are both birds, while the right side looks for differences between them. So fear between two populations keeps each one from appreciating the "other" as human. This is especially pertinent for young adults, including 18- to 22-yearold soldiers, for whom the prefrontal cortex is still developing. Because this part of the brain is involved in decision-making, impulse inhibition, social behavior and judgment, the demographic is particularly impressionable and more prone to forming fearful associations, Litvin points out.

These tendencies may also lead to a victim ethos. "Israeli politicians invoke fear by perpetuating a victim narrative based on centuries of real persecution of Jewish peoples," Litvin wrote on the blog Mondoweiss. "In effect, they reinforce a form of collective PTSD, whereby annihilation is eternally around the corner. Thus, fear enables a level of aggression and oppression that is part of daily life in the reality of occupation."

Although it's difficult to replace fear with

"THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME IN HER LIFE THAT A JEW HAD TOUCHED HER. AND IT FELT GOOD."

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Clockwise from far left: St. Mary's Syrian Orthodox Church overlooks a Bethlehem street. Peace activist Antwan Saca and the wall. Two Muslim girls pass a Christian shop near the Nativity Church. A predominantly Muslim neighborhood near Damascus Gate in Jerusalem's Old City. All aboard the Jerusalem Light Rail.

empathy in the shadow of a wall, "universal human languages" such as art and music can bridge gaps, he says. "People are people. This isn't a religious conflict but a conflict between an occupying force and the occupied. Once people have something to live for, then they don't want to shoot missiles and they don't want to get into tanks."

One state, two state, five states, no state — peace is about more than just borders and the dense binary of politics. Peace is a way of interacting with the other such that common ground (figuratively and literally, in this case) dissolves the notion of "other" altogether.

"On both sides, people go to sleep wishing the other side will disappear, but the reality is nobody is going away," Saca says. "The eventual outcome is that people need to learn to share this land."

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To decompress and ease the transition into civilian life at home, many IDF veterans go abroad after their service. Every year some 40,000 Israelis backpack through India, where 90 percent of them use cannabis and 25 percent use psychedelics, says a spokesperson for Hapina Shelanu, a safe zone in India that helps Israelis process their psychedelic and high-risk experiences. After partying on the beaches of Goa (a hot spot on the so-called "hummus trail"), Israeli trance fans bring the music — and drug experiences — back home.

Most Israelis get their drugs illegally since the medical cannabis program serves only patients for whom traditional treatments have failed for at least a year. Israeli cannabis provider Tikun Olam ("Repair the World") found that more than 84 percent of PTSD patients reported improvement after using pot. Cannabis treats PTSD symptoms by suppressing dream and/or nightmare recall and focusing patients on the present, explains Rick Doblin, executive director of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, or MAPS. But to actually cure PTSD, there's another option. "If you were to design a drug to treat PTSD, MDMA would be it," Doblin says. Because PTSD increases activity in the amygdala, which processes fear, and decreases activity in the prefrontal cortex, which generates rational thought, it destroys trust and makes it difficult to feel safe. MDMA, on the other hand, "decreases activity in the amygdala, increases activity in the prefrontal cortex and increases connectivity between the hippocampus and amygdala, where memories are moved into long-term storage," he says. "With PTSD, memories are never in the past; they're always about to happen again." So MDMA allows people to look at memories with less fear attached and fully process their emotions. The once-called "love drug" also releases the hormones prolactin and oxytocin, which build feelings of trust and safety.

MAPS has been conducting MDMA-assisted psychotherapy studies in Israel for more than a decade. The treatment has been successful for more than 83 percent of PTSD patients who've undergone two eight-hour MDMA sessions.

The obvious reality, though, is that the psychedelic solution is available only to a few — and fewer still in Palestine. "When you walk in the

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street, you rarely find anyone smiling," says Gazan writer Wajiha Al Abyad. "People's perspective on life is totally damaged. We're just waiting for another war to launch." Children in Gaza are more aggressive toward themselves and each other too, she adds. "You reach a point where you have to choose whether to continue with this anger, aggression and desire for revenge, or to just forgive and to live in peace."

But attaining that goal will require more than mind- altering substances.

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Psychologist Mohammad Mansour with Physicians for Human Rights Israel treats Gazans' "conflict trauma" and "continued post-trauma." Without stable electricity or freedom of movement, along with high unemployment and dirty water, Gaza is widely described as an "open-air prison." Mansour performs family and individual interventions, delivers an annual conference on mental health in the Gaza Strip and trains counselors from the Palestinian Ministry of Health and other organizations. "Because of the continuation of attacks and the siege in Gaza, we try to build psychological immunity and resiliency," he says. Laughing, playing, going about routine life despite war — simple actions such as these, along with nonviolent resistance, help the healing process.

Parents also need to make space for children's emotions. "Pain that is not transformed is transmitted," says Nitsan Joy Gordon, lecturer-facilitator at the integrated Tel Hai College Field Studies Department, paraphrasing author Richard Rohr. "Caretakers need to give children, especially boys, the message that it's okay to cry, it's okay to have your feelings; when we are disconnected from our feelings and pain, it's harder to feel empathy toward other people and easier to act in horrible ways."

Through compassionate-listening workshops, playback theater and dance therapy, participants share their stories, cry, hear others and feel heard. Programs such as Gordon's and Holy Land Trust help people confront fear, trauma and prejudices — without walking out when it gets tough—and face the "other" on a human level. "I still remember sitting across from a Palestinian woman, massaging each other's hands toward the end of one meeting," says Gordon. "Later she said that this was the first time in her life that a Jew had touched her. And it felt good."



Palestinians and Israeli military personnel share a street corner in Jerusalem's Old City.

Empathy can manifest in policy too, as demonstrated by other war-torn regions. "Projects we see from South Africa, Ireland and Rwanda show that recognizing trauma was very important in the process of healing those societies," says Liel Maghen, co-director of the Israel-Palestine Creative Regional Initiatives. "There should be an official recognition of the responsibility for the trauma toward the other, which can be by an official apology." In Northern Ireland and apartheid South Africa, there was a "transitional justice process" in which the solution was based on power sharing rather than splitting land, adds Maghen, who also recommends integrating schools and rebuilding demolished homes. "Israelis want recognition of a Jewish state, their connection to the land, and Palestinians want human rights," he says. "There's always tension, so it's a question of what you do with it."

Antwan Saca finds hope in the reconciliation between Germans and Jews. And in light of American influence, left-leaning millennials and Gen Xers, according to the Brookings Institution, are fast becoming the largest voting bloc — large enough to oust politicians with regressive tribal views.

As to the tension Maghen brings up, the answer can be quite simple: "Create a culture that engages with it," he says.

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The urgency and wrenching difficulty of this work suffuses the story of a Palestinian named Bassam Aramin. At the age of 17, Aramin began to serve seven years in prison: He saw his actions as resistance, while Israeli security forces labeled him a terrorist. He taught himself Hebrew and learned about the Holocaust. What he once believed was an Israeli lie brought tears to his eyes. Aramin finished his time, established the binational nonviolence organization Combatants for Peace — and then found his ideals challenged: An Israeli soldier injured his 10-year-old daughter near her school. She died days later. "There is no revenge," says Aramin as he recalls seeing the soldier in court. "The killer of my daughter is a victim. I have five more kids. I don't want them to grow up victims. You move to a place where you feel stronger than this victim. I take revenge by forgiving him without any mercy."

Today Aramin is a member of the Parents Circle, a collective of bereaved Israeli and Palestinian parents. Jesus said to love your enemy, he points out. "That means to love someone who comes to kill you. He cannot harm you because love is stronger than hatred. It's very simple, but it's very difficult to practice."

Aramin's battle-scarred passion is there in Saca's vision that morning on the rooftop: Healing from trauma means living in the present by honoring the past without letting it dictate the future.

Later that night, I'm in Yafo, a beachy mixed Palestinian-Israeli town south of Tel Aviv. I'm with friends at one of my favorite bars, a place called Anna Loulou, and we're drinking our Taybeh and Goldstar (Palestinian and Israeli beers, respectively), lighting joints outside, dancing together, Jews and Arabs, sharing one of the city's liveliest hideouts. We're not signing treaties or pushing a "solution," but it's peaceful here, and part of a process: Israelis and Palestinians co-existing in this complicated, chaotic and beautiful plot of the Holy Land. ■

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The Historic First Sext



Whitney Paige Venable

Photography by **JESTON BRANDON @PERFECTLYFLAWLESSPHOTO**
Text by **NELLY MADUNA**

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Describe yourself in three words
I would describe myself as passionate, spontaneous, and positive.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Yes, I was very excited!

What was it like starting out as a model?
It was a confidence booster, and I realized I really enjoy being behind the camera.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
I would say taking a risk with very sexy photography and staying open minded throughout the process.

Describe your perfect day off when you are not modelling?
I enjoy studying, working out, or hanging out with friends.

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
City person.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
I'd like to live in Europe at some point in my life.

Do you have a secret talent?
I think I am an excellent detective.

A guilty pleasure?
I love getting oily massages.

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
I don't really cry, but Hello by Adele does something to me.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
Well, I don't know what my favourite word is, but I do know how to say "yes" in every language.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
I hope you enjoy my pictures, you can also find me on Instagram @blondebella_xo





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PLAYBOY'S PARTY JOKES



Football season is here!" booms a man as he enters a sports bar.

The bartender chuckles. "Here to watch the game, friend?"

"Game? I just like having an excuse to binge-drink four out of seven days. Speaking of which, what sports play on Tuesdays and Wednesdays?"

One in five men surveyed say they enjoy prostate stimulation as part of their sexual repertoire. Of the others, three are currently googling "prostate stimulation diagram," and one is a liar.

It's Thanksgiving and a suburban family is going around the table, telling one another what they're thankful for.

"I'm thankful for the turkey," says eight-year-old Bobby.

"That's nice," says his uncle Roy. "Is that your favorite food?"

"No. I just like that it puts you assholes to sleep."

A few weeks later, that same kid is sitting on Santa's lap at a local department store.

"What do you want for Christmas, young man?" Santa asks.

"Well, I don't really want any presents," Bobby says.

"No presents!" says Santa, frowning. "Then what do you want?"

"For you to quit judging me the whole goddamn year."

In a recent survey, 94 percent of respondents said they'd like to have sex in an airplane. In related news: Don't touch any surface in an airplane.

Fun fact: Astroglide was invented by a NASA scientist, presumably to help astronauts get into their spacesuits. Seriously, guys — couldn't you have bought them flowers and put on a groovy record instead?

Irish coffee: because why put off daydrinking till the afternoon?

A woman and her dim-witted husband are relaxing and reading the newspaper one Sunday morning.

"Sad, isn't it," says t he woman. "According to this, most people check their phones immediately after they have sex."

"Jeez," the husband says, looking up in alarm. "Why are people letting their phones have sex?"

Getting coal in your stocking means you've been bad, but getting "cleanburning coal" in your stocking means an American industry is thriving!

Two women are watching some kids make a snowman in a neighbor's yard.

"I wish my husband was a snowman," says one.

"Why, so you could dress him up and change him into exactly what you want him to be?"

"No," the first woman replies. "I just want him to disappear when the weather gets nicer."

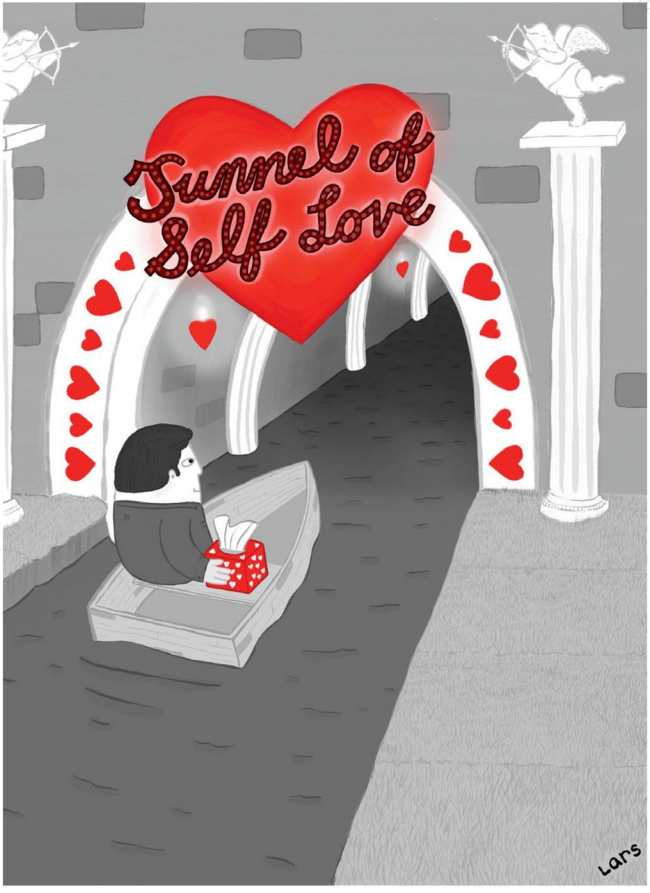
In the near future, we're all going to have lifelike sex robots, which means we're also going to have sex-robot tech support. So if you thought getting talked through finding "the button" during sex put a damper on things, imagine getting a verbal tour of your cybernetic honey from the office IT guy.

Whenever you're feeling bad about yourself, just remember there are people who argue with one another in the comments section of porn videos.



Three words, Mr. President: pumpkin space latte.

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THE QUEEN OF MAJESTIC

FICTION BY **T. JEFFERSON PARKER**

The desert sky was vast and salted with stars. Bill stepped away from the telescope so Margo could look. The telescope was powerful and expensive, a present from Margo to Bill on his 60th birthday, the month before. He lifted the bottle of wine from the hood of the Jeep and poured some into their glasses. Bill took a sip and looked at his wife standing at the tripod, her back to him, her hands out and away from the delicate instrument, which tracked the chosen target with a computer and a silent motor. Margo leaned slightly at the waist. White summer dress. Thick brown hair. She was still shapely and Bill felt lucky to have married her those 30-plus years ago. He had never fully believed that he deserved her, though she was an occasional challenge.

"I wonder what that is," she said.

"Where?"

"Out over the hills."

He looked and saw nothing. It was just before 10 o'clock and the fierce Mojave heat was gone. Bill took another sip of wine and felt the thankfulness come over him. Their health was good. Their children were on their own now, both doing well. The LAPD pension was ample. They still owned their longtime Simi Valley house, and their renters were dependable.

The new job out here in the desert was every bit as challenging and goofy as he had hoped it would be. Police Chief Bill Overlake of Majestic, California, population 378 humans, 12 horses, 10 to 20 dogs not counting wild ones, and six burros. The job kept him active, brought in money, and got him and Margo away from Los Angeles. But they were still close to Las Vegas, where their son Zach and his family had settled, close enough to L.A. for visits and shopping, and close to the Sierras for fishing. And they were living under the clear Mojave sky for stargazing, the newfound pleasures of which had surprised them both.

"I don't see anything but stars," said Bill.

"I'll sic the computer on it. Satellite I bet."

"Plenty of those."

"Spying on us," she said.

ILLUSTRATION BY **MARC ASPINALL**


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"That's just the media scaring people, honey. Fear sells."

"I have nothing to fear because you'll protect me."

"And serve. In any way you want to be served."

"I know what that means, Mr. Billy Goat. No lights on that UFO, whatever it is."

"No lights. A smuggler?"

"Maybe. Slow, for a plane. Either that or it's further away than it looks."

"Let me see."

Margo stepped away. "It's tracking perfectly.

This computer is something."

Bill settled into gazing position, his wife's perfume and faint body heat still lingering near the aperture. He saw the movement, something dark suspended within the larger darkness. It was shapeless from here, flying low and slowly and, to Bill's eye, in a straight line, east to west. Then it appeared to turn toward them. He watched for a moment to make sure he was seeing it right.

"Coming this way now," he said.

"What is it?"

"I still can't tell." He watched it moving closer. Things like this — small, unusual, unexplainable things — were part of what made stargazing what it was. Meteors and satellites. Weather balloons and UFOs. He lifted his face from the telescope for a moment and peered naked-eyed toward the low sky over the hills and saw that some of the heavenly points of light were going out then coming back on as something passed between them and him. Eye again to the scope, he saw it was closer now.

"Bill, is that a motor I hear?" Her ears were better than his now, after his years at the range, qualifying for the job and shooting on the team.

"Oh wow," he said. "It's a fixed-wing something-or-other. It looks like a glider. Weird, though, without the lights."

"There it is! Way out there. And I do hear a motor."

"An ultralight? A drone? This tracking computer is amazing, Margo."

Bill watched the craft coming toward them. The engine groaned distantly. It didn't sound strong enough to keep something that large aloft. Now that it was closer he saw that the underside was pale and faintly, icily blue, like moonlight. The wings were long and wide and the body slender. It looked lighter and less substantial than an airplane, but larger than the Predator drones he'd seen, not clunky like an ultralight, but graceful. And now that it was no more than half a mile away, Bill's birthday telescope revealed the faint, flickering lights inside a bulbous faceted head and the four missiles — two under each wing—fixed tight to the body.

"Damn thing's armed," he said. "Gotta be dummies. Am I seeing this right?"

"I swear to God it's coming lower, Bill. And right at us."

"I hear it now."

"I'm afraid. What do we do?"

"Honey, don't."

Margo was quicker to fear than her husband, so he often found himself acting on her fear rather than by his own calmer nature. But it was important to keep your spouse feeling protected and served. A 30-year L.A. cop learned that. And so far as the food chain went, he was right up at the top. Awareness, not fear. Preparation, not worry. Cool, not hysteria.

"We better do something, Bill."

"Give it five more seconds."

"Why? And then what?"

"Okay, okay—we'll play it safe, Margo. You hustle away from here the same way we came in. Careful with the knee. Find some cover, hide and wait. I'll take the Jeep the other way then circle back and get you. Go now. It's okay."

She looked at the thing, then back at him, wide-eyed. "I love you, Bill."

"I love you. We'll laugh about this later."

He watched her run up the two-track they'd come in on, brown hair bouncing, elbows in and forearms up.

When he looked up toward the hills again he was surprised how much closer the strange, unlit craft had come. He felt that a truth was dawning on him, but he wasn't sure exactly what truth it was.

Bill grabbed the tripod and swung open a rear door and dropped the instrument onto the backseat, its legs still splayed. When he shut the door the wine bottle teetered and the wineglasses shivered and Bill backhanded them off the hood and into a creosote bush. He got in and started the engine and looked at Margo. She had already put some good distance between them. As if she felt his eyes on her, she glanced back midstride and Bill laid into the horn to say I love you too, then threw the shifter into drive and gunned it into the flat dark desert.

The desert was not as flat as it looked. The Jeep sat up high, and the faster he went the harder it jolted and jumped when it hit the mounds of dirt and rocks and bushes and cacti, only to plummet gut-droppingly into the soft low pockets of sand. He tried to steer around such things, but soon he was going too fast to avoid anything. He shot a look into the sideview for Margo: nothing but bouncing black earth. He roared up a hillock, and when he cleared the rise, the pale blue underbelly of the aircraft squared itself in his rearview mirror. Shit, he thought. But good. On me. Margo okay. He charged across the small plateau, down the other side and back onto the flats, the airborne thing still glued to his rearview, unvarying and slowly closing, maybe a quarter mile back.

Bill hit a sand flat. He wondered if his Jeep — it had the big V-8 — might just outrun the lumbering device following him, so he floored it. The tires dug in then rode higher and true as he accelerated. But when he turned for a quick look, the flying machine was closer than he thought. Then the Joshua trees were whizzing spikily past him, as if they'd jumped in from the darkness, and he cranked the wheel to miss the closest one. This sudden turn aimed him toward another bladed tree just a few yards away, which he managed to only clip with the grille of the Jeep, but that left him braking and sandplowing toward another tree that he hit broadside. The heavy telescope hurtled through the windshield and slammed into the tree as if to protect him from it.

He got his autoloader from the glove box, jacked a round into the chamber and climbed out. Through the spined canopy above him he could see the plane, drone, phantom, whatever it was, humming steadily in on its course. He leaned back against the Jeep, raised the .40 caliber, found a space in the Joshua tree limbs and held a little ahead of his oncoming target. Squeezed off three rounds. Bill had been part of the LAPD shooting team and he was used to the idea that bullets went where he made them go. After the third shot, when nothing at all happened to his target, Bill realized what a stupendously useless idea this was, throwing bullets against a flying monster in the black of night. He held a little higher and fired off three more rounds anyway.

Against all odds — but in keeping with his faith in a higher and beneficent power — at least one of the bullets must have hit its mark. Because Bill saw a quick puff of white smoke, then a red ember — a small explosion. Had he hit a fuel line? Sparked a fire? Then the ember sprouted a white tail and streaked across the sky toward Bill. It came very fast, then much faster. Bill raised his sidearm to the flaming, smoketailed devil, settled into his shooter's stance and gauged his lead.

• • •

Margo saw the fiery descent of the rocket and heard the explosion. A lump of orange light rose from Bill's direction. She was in the middle of the Mojave Desert, bent over, hands on her knees, breathing rapidly. Not so much as a boulder to hide behind. Not a tree. Not even a low spot for cover. Faint and far out, the mother ship banked into a neat pale-bellied turn, and came straight toward her.

She turned and ran. Ran with all her heart. And more. Legs so heavy. Stars and tears. Tears and stars. Bill. Zach and Jan. Sound of the engine coming. And her own breath bellowing in her ears, roar of life, in and out.

Sucking air, she slowed and stopped and turned to see. It came. Half a mile out? A quarter? The orange dome of flames still glowed in the east, now tipped in black. She went to one knee and picked a rock off the ground, a round throwing-size rock. She'd pitched softball in college, partial scholarship, high 60s on a good day. She was feared. When the missile bloomed silently she stood to face it, cradling the stone before her in both hands — as she used to do on the pitcher's mound — ready to windmill her arm and shift that weight to her rear leg. Just before the delivery she would tell herself: You

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can't hit me, you can't hit me. She waited, her arm now a sling against this Goliath.

• • •

Forty-eight minutes later, just after 11, the little convoy came barreling across the desert on a faint two-track. A truck-mounted crane bounced nimbly on oversize tires designed for desert warfare. A railed flatbed dually came next, its cargo hold containing two crude wooden trunks, reinforced with metal bands, the size and shape of coffins.

HE RAISED THE .40 CALIBER, SQUEEZED OFF THREE ROUNDS.

Bringing up the rear was another flatbed, empty. These three vehicles were chromeless and painted matte black, and the windows were dark and nonreflecting. Leading the charge was a short, lowslung, big-tired sand buggy with a roll cage and two powerful headlights, and a warning whip now curved backward with speed. Matte gray. The driver, in a ball cap and goggles within the cage of his speeding vehicle, played back and forth across the sand, rhythmically, like a downhill skier, his gloved hands relaxed on the wheel.

When the narrow half-road dwindled to nothing, the vehicles all slowed and spread into the desert and picked their way forward. They went to the carcass of the Jeep first. The big crane lifted the twisted, smoldering, sand-dripping body high into the air and swung it onto the empty flatbed. Two men and two women in desert camo and combat boots worked a large olive tarp over the husk and ran nylon ropes through the grommets and cinched it down. Then another tarp, crossways, and another passing of the rope up and over. Two other men in camo stood and watched. The dune-buggy driver paced, occasionally checking his watch. He wore jeans and cowboy boots, the ball cap and an untucked work shirt.

Next they collected the body of the man and put it in one of the trunks, then closed the lid. They found flashlights and spread out unhurriedly away from where the Jeep had been, light beams crossing and uncrossing, picking up things from the desert floor and dropping them into orange plastic buckets. Two of the men had long-handled metal detectors. When they were finished they hoisted their buckets into the flatbed that contained the remains of the vehicle, then three of them pulled leaf blowers from the other dually. They trotted out as far as their search had taken them, started up the blowers and backed across the desert floor, erasing their footprints from the surface, all the way back to the vehicles idling in the moon-brushed darkness. The dust formed a cloud.

Within minutes and half a mile, they boxed the woman and slid her into the truck bed beside the man. They collected and swept her area too. Another, smaller, dust cloud formed. Then the vehicles trundled out the way they'd come in, same order, nonreflectingly, vanishing a few pixels at a time into the east.

2

Eight miles away and deep in the Alpha-Neutronica compound, surveillance analyst Dixie Willoughby sat in the theater and moved her gaze from monitor to monitor, left to right, then back, down a row and across again, like reading. An old yellow Labrador slept on his pad beside her.

It was quarter to 10 at night and she was almost two hours into her shift. There were 60 monitors in all, arranged in six tiers of 10, forming the front wall of the theater. Dixie sat at her workstation, centered to the screens and 20 feet back. The top three rows of monitors were dedicated to exterior surveillance, not Dixie's favorite, because really nothing much happened outdoors in the middle of the Mojave Desert, especially in the punitively hot summer. The bottom three rows showed live feeds from some of the homes and businesses of tiny Majestic, just five miles from here. The citizenry had no idea that they were being watched and recorded like this, which was the whole point. Dixie thought of the unknowing people as friends, and sometimes — jokingly, of course — of herself as their Queen. It took her 66 seconds to read all 60 screens — out of boredom she'd timed herself.

But she had been trained by Alpha-Neutronica to miss nothing, and that is exactly what she missed. So far, the summer's exterior highlights were coyotes running down jackrabbits, foxes hunting kangaroo rats, desert tortoises lumbering around in what looked like loneliness and some interesting little snakes that could glide under the sand without digging a hole. Once she'd seen a car park and the people inside begin to mate. He was a middle-aged man with plump hairless knuckles, and she a young woman, both of them eager. They were disgusting.

Dixie's Talon-2 autonomous unmanned airborne vehicles featured fourth-generation Owl surveillance clusters. The Talon-2 was technically still in development, but the marketers were already taking orders worldwide. It could deliver real-time, high-res video of, say, a sand snake — a foot long at best — from 35,000 feet away.

As the name said, it was unmanned, thus no onboard pilot needed. And because it was autonomous, the Talon-2 required no remote pilot either. No human required to fly its mission, once the programming was done. A flying machine with a mind, literally, of its own. Or so the designers liked to say. Employees of Alpha Neutronica were forbidden to call an AUAV a drone — ever, under any circumstances, even to friends. A company spokesman was once fired for using the word in an interview. Nevertheless, AlphaNeutronica was known within the military industry as the world's largest manufacturer of drones and strategic nuclear weapons.

The dog on the floor beside her extended its legs in a quivering stretch and took a noisy deep breath without waking up. Orwell was a worldclass sleeper. Dixie was about to turn her attention to the much more interesting interior surveillance screens in Majestic when something on screen eight, top row, caught her infallible eye. At first it looked like one of the light-hungry moths or beetles that occasionally got into the room. But Dixie saw that the motion was part of the feed. A vehicle had just entered Sector NW-1, the northwestern boundary of AlphaNeutronica's surveillance grid. As programmed, the Talon-2 hovered and Owl

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zoomed in. Zoomed again. Using the controls on her console Dixie overrode the Owl sensor ball and came in even tighter.

She saw a late model Jeep, black and white, with a light bar on top, speeding crazily across the desert. She recognized the vehicle and driver — the recently hired Majestic police chief Bill Overlake. For some weeks now Dixie had observed Bill and his wife out here at night, their little telescope set up, drinking wine and talking about whatever old married people talked about. No sign of her now. Margie? Maggie? Bill and his wife seemed like nice enough people. Dixie had seen them at the Roadrunner Café, and at the Red Face Trading Post, buying newspapers and coffee. Bill was sure in a hurry now. With the Owl zoom locked in at maximum, Dixie could see the sweat on Bill's face, saw him glance up at the rearview, his expression grim.

She pulled back to see what was behind Bill Overlake, but suddenly all 60 surveillance monitors went dark.

Great, she thought. The most interesting thing all night, now a blackout. It was probably one of the occasional unannounced blackouts engineered by Marcus Spahn himself and later revealed to be part of cybersecurity countermeasures. In that case, the monitors would be back online in a few minutes.

Dixie sat in the screen-darkened theater. The lights and air conditioning were still on. Orwell had sensed the change, so he plodded over and looked up at her, his face filled with sleepy devotion. Dixie bent over and rubbed the back of one ear, then the other. He crashed to the carpet with pleasure, tail tapping.

To Dixie, there was something beautiful about the unconditional love that Orwell gave her. Dixie was six feet three inches tall and full-bodied. For most of her life she had been told she was hulking, so she thought of herself as hulking. She embraced her hulkishness by wearing loose black clothing and big black Dr. Martens boots that looked as if they were made for moonwalking. She stood up straight. She had dense black hair that formed a kind of privacy screen around her pleasant face, a peaches-and-cream complexion, and blue eyes behind nerdish glasses.

She swiped her employee card at the exit and waited for the door's complex unlocking sounds to finally resolve. When the door closed behind Orwell the same sounds locked them out.

In the lunchroom, security guard Nelson was pouring coffee while guard Weber sipped his own, looking through the steam at Dixie.

"The monitors are all down," she said.

"Spahn probably. I just made coffee."

"No, thanks. I'm going outside."

"It's a free country."

"That's funny, Weber, considering what we do here."

Through the coffee steam she caught his look, a perfect security guard's combination of humorlessness and suspicion.

She went outside and upstairs and stood at the railing of the employee patio, looking down at the AlphaNeutronica compound below and the dark desert beyond. There were a few lights on in Marcus Spahn's beloved lethal autonomous unmanned aerial vehicle annex, where the armed, autonomous crafts were designed and assembled.

Dixie saw people moving around down there, most unusual for this time of night. Then she heard vehicles starting up. "What do you make of all that, Orwell? What's Marcus up to now?"

Could be anything, she thought. As Alpha-Neutronica's top test engineer, Spahn had a hand in most projects. But the LAUAVs were his babies, and very little was known about the LAUAVs outside of Spahn's elite team. The Lethal Team. They were a happily arrogant crew. Marcus Spahn was darkly handsome and he knew it, and he hired unreasonably attractive people too, so that you didn't need to ask if any one of them was LAUAV; it was pretty much written on their faces.

Although there was something genuine about Spahn's face, in Dixie's opinion. Not that she saw him up close very often.

SHE H EARD IDLING VEHICLES A ND L OW, CURT VOICES.

Surveillance analysts, grade three, such as Dixie — and other lesser players here at AlphaNeutronica—were not even close to cleared for LAUAV annex access. Her employee badge would literally set off alarms if she tried to swipe her way in. And the whole annex was surrounded by butt-ugly, desertrusted, 10-foot-high chain link anyway.

The beautiful, swashbuckling LAUAV people had their own mess hall and kept their own hours. For days, sometimes weeks at a time, they'd all be gone — out at the fabled proving grounds, or perhaps in meetings with Alpha- Neutronica founder Dr. James Vermange in his Nob Hill mansion, Tahoe compound or San Marino estate.

Now something unusual was afoot down in the annex. She heard idling vehicles and thumping sounds and low sporadic voices that were carried back to her by the dry desert breeze. Curt voices. Serious. Someone in charge. Spahn? Hard to say. Going? Going where? Too bad her monitors were all out or she could just sit back and watch the show. Then in the dim moonlight Dixie saw the convoy heading down the LAUAV-only dirt road toward the LAUAV-only gate in the LAUAV-only chainlink fence that separated them from the rest of Alpha Neutronica and the world.

• • •

One hour and 40 minutes later Dixie's monitors were still nonoperational but the Lethal Team was on its way home. In the break room she looped Orwell's leash to a table leg, clocked out for her break and took the back stairs down to avoid Nelson and Weber. She stayed within the desert blackness as she made her way toward the LAUAV annex.

Of course the Lethal Team area was verboten, but one of the gates was often left unlocked by scofflaw employees. And she knew that if she could find Spahn before one of his underlings threw her out, he just might let her know what all the excitement was about. She believed this because, in the exactly six times that she had made eye contact with Spahn, his peacefullooking gray eyes had held her gaze with steadiness, curiosity and — she thought — interest.

Her lucky night. She closed the gate quietly

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behind her and followed the path toward the compound. The vehicles were shutting down and doors were opening and closing and short bursts of conversation came from the central terminal — an enormous metal barn with four rolling metal doors along each long side and small windows set at eight feet to admit sunlight and defeat the curious. Now only minimal light from inside.

She stopped in the solid darkness, short of the weak terminal light. She saw princely Spahn and two of his knights in conversation. Saw two Lethal Teamers pulling down tarps from a charred vehicle standing on a flatbed. A Jeep. With a star-shaped outline on the door where an emblem had apparently melted off. Light bar half severed, half dangling.

Dixie's heart dropped. She backstepped farther into the dark, then circled to one side of
the building and came up close. Darkness and dirt under her boots, the mumble of voices inside. She crept to the edge of the raised rolling
door. A good view from behind them now: two grim-faced men she'd seen but never met, handing down a coffin-like box to two other men she'd seen but never met. Spahn and the others watching. The box didn't look heavy, just big. Then another. When the boxes were resting side-by-side, Spahn opened them. The lids stayed up on hinges.

Dixie turned her back to the metal wall, stood still as she could. Felt the big booms of her heart and wondered if the people inside could hear them too. If that wasn't Bill Overlake's Jeep, and Bill and Margie, Maggie,
shit, Mrs. Overlake inside those boxes, then what? Who?

Suddenly an argument erupted inside the terminal. Voices loud, then louder. Dixie could hear Spahn talking over them. "A terrible accident is still an accident," he said, but one of the women yelled that right and wrong mean something too.

Voices she could not identify:

"We should have left them out there."

"We sure as hell can't take them back!"

"The DoD will cover us if we come clean."

"I will not spend the rest of my life in prison."

Then Spahn again in a booming voice: "This is the cost of freedom! There are always mistakes in science. You know this. We all came here with our eyes open."

The argument ended as suddenly as it had begun. An eerie silence. Dixie risked a peek inside and saw almost exactly what she had imagined seeing: the eight AlphaNeutronica employees standing in a semicircle around the two open boxes, heads bowed at this strange service.

• • •

She clocked back in from her break, saw that she'd overstayed the allotted 30 minutes by six minutes and 18 seconds. She unhooked Orwell, knelt and stroked his fine heavy head. She felt like she was in a dream she could not escape from. Everything familiar but everything changed, everything wrong.

Back in the surveillance theater Dixie put on her black cardigan against the aggressive AC, then sat heavily in her wheeled task chair. Orwell collapsed with a humpf. Her monitors had come back to life and she watched the black night on them. Third tier, second from left: kangaroo rat. Bottom tier, third from right: owl. She was too distracted to even care about her human Majestic friends, oblivious as they were to her.

Her shift would end at six §.˙. and wild horses couldn't drag her from duty before that appointed hour. Her duty was her life. So she sat there, replaying every second, every frame of the past hours. She believed that Spahn was smart, and the others were smart too, and that they would find a way to destroy the evidence of their accidental homicides. Of a policeman and his wife. Nice couple. She believed the DoD and CIA would probably move heaven and earth to protect their interests here, their programs, their people. As would James Vermange, billionaire recluse owner of AlphaNeutronica, the world's largest purveyor of drones and strategic nuclear missiles. As would the president, if the president knew.

And as for her, hulking Dixie Willoughby, grade-three surveillance analyst offering her devotion and her life to this Republic?

Who was she to defy them?

Why should she defy them?

And if she were to defy them, how?

• • •

She finished her shift, collected Orwell and punched out. Waved to Nelson and Weber. She drove the private road ahead of the soonincoming day shift, which started at 7:30. She passed the living land, AlphaNeutronica employees, a sun-blanched little hamlet of modular homes that smacked of military-base housing. Small market and stores. High prices. A park with swings for the kids. Scaled-back "express" fast-food franchises. The employees who lived there called themselves Alpha- Neuroticans and their home Neuroticа Acres. Dixie's address was 12 Sam Colt Drive.

She drove past Neurotica Acres, took the highway north into the hills where she liked to hike and hunt rocks with Orwell. It was sere and forbidding land, wind-contoured boulders and sharp, shivering plants, but it was beautiful
too, especially at sunrise, like now, and at sunset.

She walked slowly because Orwell was no longer young, and the early-morning temperature was already in the high 70s. And because she, Dixie, though 28, no longer felt young, as of last night.

As she crunched along, Dixie thought of Majestic's 378 human citizens she had secretly observed for the last two-plus years. None of them yet suspected they were human lab rats, so expertly hidden were the tiny interior cameras and so utterly silent the AUAV observations made from far above. She was quite fond of most of her people, in spite of their faults. She wanted what was best for them and often spent her long graveyard surveillance hours imagining what she would do for certain Majesticans who just needed a little help. Such as Lance, the mentally retarded teenager who ran off into the desert for days at a time, collecting odd objects to bring back home to his disabled war-vet father. What about a better pair of boots for him? And a new TV for Cathy, the ancient, lonely baseball fan whose television was failing. There was Bethany, the cute blackjack dealer who commuted all the way to Las Vegas and most nights cried herself to sleep in her faded yellow trailer. A tough case, that one. And others. In a way, she loved them. It was an invisible, noninvasive, impersonal love, but didn't that count?

She had no siblings and no friends, really, except her very preoccupied UCI Med Center parents — Dr. Mom in Neurosciences and Dr. Dad in Hematology. Some distant cousins back east, God knew where. People in general annoyed and disappointed her. Men so selfobsessed and women so angry yet desperate. She just felt too big and clumsy and conspicuous. Hulking. She had Orwell, her job and her modular home in Neurotica Acres —and that was about it.

She sat on a smooth rock and let the rising sun heat her face. Closed her eyes and conjured to mind every time she'd seen, in person, gentle Bill Overlake and his sweet wife — name of Margo, thank you — and how they'd seemed like two parts of the same animal. She'd seen them in reality only a few times. Sad hello once outside the Roadrunner Cafe, once in the Red Face Trading Post. Waved from her car at them, pulling out of the gas station. She'd observed them undetected in their own home, of course, a hundred times or more — kitchen, living room, bedroom. Never watched them in intimate, hygiene or potty moments. Ever.

For some reason — well, she knew exactly what the damned reason was — those memories of the Overlakes hurt her now, deeply. Because she knew the Overlakes would never, ever be alive together again. However, the scalding truth was: When she'd had the chance, just what had she offered them, these newcomers to this vast and hostile land? Two hellos and a wave in passing? Secret surveillance? A faulty prototype weapon to blow them off the face of the earth while they stargazed?

She opened her eyes. Orwell had found the shady side of her rock and lay on his side.

Dixie got out her phone and powered it up and found her voice recorder app.

"My name is Dixie Willoughby," she began.

"I am a grade-three surveillance analyst at Alpha Neutronica. Something happened last night at our R&D compound out by Majestic. Everything I'm about to tell you is true." ■

NADIA FOX

Photography by **BRIAN B. HAYES** *Text by* **NELLY MADUNA**




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Hi Nadia, can you tell our Playboy readers where you are from and where you grew up?
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Can you share with our readers your interest and passions besides modelling?
I am a total movie buff. The technical term is Cinephile, I starred in an independent film once and I played a supporting actress in another.

What did you like best about your Playboy photo shoot?
I love being on location and getting straight to the action first thing in the morning.
We saw dolphins in the ocean during our shoot which was awesome.

What do you think your friends will think of you becoming a Playboy Cover model and Playmate?
I think my friends will be excited and happy for me.

Can you tell us what makes you feel sexy?
Being wet, pools are sexy so are showers. Massages, I love being touched.

Turn-ons
A big turn on for me is men that go out of their way for us women! They are our heroes!

Turn-offs
The double standards some men live by.

Do you have any dating advice for our male readers?
Just look your best and be funny.

Can you describe your perfect date night?
Coming from a girl who had a date end with making love on Laguna beach, I will say the perfect date night would be accompanying a gentleman to a lovely dinner somewhere in a mature setting and afterwards moving to the fireplace for some intimate conversations over a glass of wine.

What are your likes and dislikes about men that hit on you?
I like men who are confident enough to do so because I hear I'm intimidating. My dislike is when people make offers that I would never say yes to.

What is your most embarrassing moment?
When I call to order take-out, and the Chinese food lady picks up and says "Yes Nadia, I recognize your voice!"

Lastly, what would you like to accomplish in 2019?
I would like to visit Europe for my first time, Italy especially!

Follow more of Nadia's adventures on Instagram @NadiaFoxInsta


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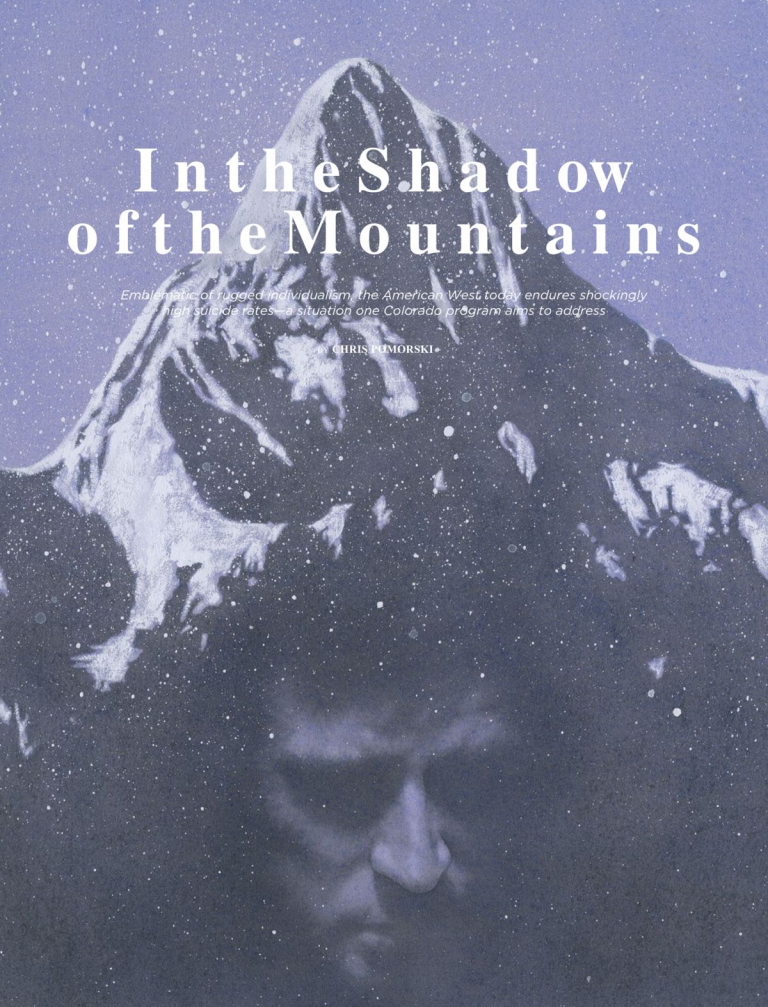


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In the Shadow of the Mountains

Emblematic of rugged individualism, the American West today endures shockingly high suicide rates—a situation one Colorado program aims to address

BY CHRIS PUMORSKI



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Telluride, Colorado is a postcard-perfect ski town of some 2,500 residents who have an alarmingly common habit of dying by suicide. It's a tendency they share with inhabitants of other Western ski areas — Aspen; Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Sun Valley, Idaho — and, more broadly, with people in the Mountain West, that vaguely top-hat-shape cluster including Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, Colorado and Nevada. By some estimates — and for reasons that remain largely mysterious — it has been the most suicidal region of the country for more than 100 years, or roughly since white migrants settled there in earnest.

Telluride lies in the southwest corner of the state, in a box canyon hemmed in by 13,000-foot Rocky Mountain peaks. Until the Rio Grande Southern Railroad arrived in the early 1890s, its isolation was acute. Between 1890 and 1895, a gold boom more than tripled the population. Financiers such as John D. Rockefeller and Harry Whitney poured in capital. But the worm soon turned. A brutal labor conflict — and gold discoveries elsewhere — sapped Telluride's allure. By 1970 fewer than 600 people lived there.

Around 1975 three friends, high school seniors, began making regular trips to Telluride from Tucson, where they lived. Tom Slocum was a soft-spoken tennis star with blond hair, blue eyes and a subtle wit. Slocum had been friends with Tony Daranyi since middle school, when Daranyi's family moved to the Southwest from Peru. Bradley Steele made the trips possible — his parents had recently built a house in Telluride. The drive from Tucson took about 11 hours. En route they listened to Led Zeppelin, Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Who, tracing back roads through tribal lands of the Hopi, Navajo and Ute.

Telluride offered attractive seclusion. A few prospectors remained, but the old miners' cabins were largely occupied by countercultural types: hippies, bikers, outdoorsy hermits, druggy trustafarians. Only Main Street was paved. "Few people had heard of it," Daranyi says. "When you arrived, you felt like you'd discovered a paradise." The friends backpacked, rafted, climbed and skied. The community was warm, welcoming and inspiring. Daranyi and Slocum made a pact to return for good as adults.

Around 1985, when they were in their mid-20s, they followed through. Slocum had been working at a golf shop in Los Angeles, Daranyi as an investment banker in Chicago. To recalibrate their bearings to leave the "real world" behind — they spent time trekking on mountain bikes and camping in the desert. "Investment banking was a real dog-eatdog existence," Daranyi recalls. "I had to heal myself, purge the demons. We used to say we were dropping out but dropping in. Dropping out of society but dropping into something much more special."

Soon they were sharing a rented house with Laurel Robinson, an ex-stockbroker originally from Atlanta, and a man named Marv Kirk, a math teacher of unassuming brilliance who could single-handedly defeat teams of 10 at Trivial Pursuit. They found work at a weekly paper — Slocum in the ad department, Daranyi as a reporter — rare white-collar jobs in a catchas-catch-can economy dominated by restaurant and construction gigs. Although Telluride's new residents differed in many ways from the miners they'd replaced, they shared with them a frontier spirit — a sense of having come from elsewhere, often a great distance, forgoing physical comforts for earthier purposes.

"It was 800 people climbing, skiing, running rivers, playing cards and passing the same 20-dollar bill around," says Lance Waring, a friend of Slocum's and Daranyi's who moved to Telluride around the same time. Todd Creel, another friend, adds, "There was no class system. Everyone was here for the same reason." Potlucks, costume parties, ski burns — ceremonial pyres lit to call down snow — and liberal drug use defined the era. "My rent was $100 a month," Waring says. "The economics allowed you the luxury of making a tremendous connection with the community."

Among a cohort of explorers and free spirits, many of whom passed up family life in favor of adventure, Slocum stood out for his self- containment. He spent whole summers alone, camping out of his car. "He wanted to keep his life really simple," Daranyi says. "Fishing and camping on his way to go golfing would be his idea of a perfect weekend." After two of Slocum's brothers died — one a victim of AIDS, the other of a car accident — he didn't much discuss the events. In the early 2000s, friends were surprised when Slocum moved in with a girlfriend in Rico, about a 40-minute drive from Telluride. At Creel's weekly poker games — where Slocum was a regular, reading opponents skillfully and folding often — he acquired a new nickname: Loverboy. "He was glowing," Creel recalls. But the relationship ended, and Slocum returned to Telluride, eventually occupying a caretaker's apartment owned by a friend. The town had become glitzy and high-priced, and many in his circle had left. In the following years he withdrew from those who remained, drinking beer alone in his apartment. His legs bothered him, making him less able to participate in the adventure sports he loved. One morning in February 2016, when he was 57, he hiked to a picturesque spot above town, sat down and shot himself in the head.

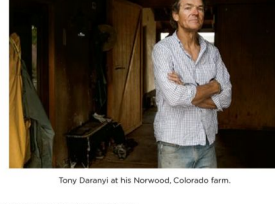
Slocum was one of six people to kill themselves that year in San Miguel County, where Telluride is by far the most populous community, making suicide responsible for nearly a quarter of the county's 25 deaths in 2016. When I visit Emil Sante, the county coroner since 2011, at his Telluride home in August, he is mourning Jim Guest, who took his own life in July at the age of 73. A charter member of Telluride's ski patrol, Guest had been locally beloved. His suicide — the county's third in 2018 —shook the town. As we sit on Sante's deck, he reviews the explanations often offered for the Mountain West's suicide problem: a cult of rugged individualism coupled with limited mental health services, the increased cost of living that has attended the development of luxury resorts, geographic isolation, changes to brain chemistry brought on by high altitudes. But Sante rejects such neat formulas.

"There is something to it," he says.

"I just don't know what it is."

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The rate at which Americans end their own lives increased nearly 30 percent between 1999 and 2016, according to a June 2018 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The data break down along familiar lines, with Native American men aged 25 to 44 and white men aged 45 to 64 accounting for the highest



Tony Daranyi at his Norwood, Colorado farm.

ILLUSTRATION BY **EDWARD KINSELLA** / PHOTOGRAPHY BY **ALEC JACOBSON**

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rates of self-inflicted death. But suicide among women increased dramatically too. It's the nation's 10th-leading cause of death, one of just three — alongside unintentional injuries and Alzheimer's — that are increasing. In 2016 nearly 45,000 Americans took their own lives, and the recent suicides of prominent figures — Robin Williams, Anthony Bourdain, Kate Spade — have drawn public attention to the issue.

The motivations for suicide represent a notoriously unnavigable archipelago of personal turmoil, ambient ills and opaque logic. Experts caution against attributing a suicide — let alone thousands of them — to any one cause. Yet in the U.S., suicide has long been framed primarily as a mental health issue. Literature on the subject often proceeds from the assumption that some 90 percent of suicide victims can be shown, based on psychological autopsy studies, to have suffered from mental illness. We have thus understood suicide largely as the desperate recourse of unsound minds, and prevention efforts focus overwhelmingly on mental health, often emphasizing crisis intervention: hotlines, tips on recognizing distress, how to talk to a suicidal friend.

Against that backdrop, it's striking that the CDC study cautions that "approximately half of suicide decedents...did not have a known mental health condition." America, the report urges, needs a radically more diversified, public-health-based approach to suicide prevention. But in addition to discrete goals with selfevident relevance to suicide — reducing substance abuse and access to guns, increasing access to counseling — the CDC prescribes complex, politically sensitive initiatives that span urban planning, education and civic engagement: "strengthening economic supports (e.g., housing stabilization policies, household financial support); teaching coping and problem-solving skills to manage everyday stressors and prevent future relationship problems...promoting social connectedness to increase a sense of belonging and access to informational, tangible, emotional and social support."

Experts emphasize that among suicidal thinkers, external factors tend to overlap with mental health struggles. Christine Moutier, the chief medical officer at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, tells me, "People who are in a state of well mental health don't think about ending their life." But it's difficult not to notice that the CDC report suggests a substantial reknitting of the social fabric, positioning the rise in suicide less as a distinct disease than as a symptom of deep, widespread ruptures in American life.

Although suicide rates increased in virtually every state from 1999 to 2016, the effects aren't uniformly distributed. The Mountain West stands out for especially dire statistics — much of the region experienced rate increases of 38 to 58 percent. With around 290 deaths annually, Montana has the nation's highest rate of suicide.

Colorado, however, tallies the most yearly suicide deaths in the region, making it an ideal testing ground for a fresh approach to prevention. In 2015 it was selected for a CDC-funded program tasked with creating a comprehensive framework for "upstream" prevention, addressing populations in which "no suicidal thinking or behaviors may be apparent." The strategy mimics those for heart-attack and cancer prevention, which begin well before the onset of disease. Based in Colorado's Office of Suicide Prevention, the program coordinates players including universities, businesses, courts, mental health organizations and public agencies, and aims to reduce suicide 20 percent statewide by 2024.

A 2017 study raises the possibility of a Mountain West "culture of suicide."

It now operates in six pilot counties, with plans to roll out in Colorado's other 58 counties; a statewide model could be exported further afield. It's unclear what that model will be; contributing factors vary considerably more for suicide than for cardiac arrest. But it might include things like community- building 5Ks and park cleanups, affordable-housing advocacy, tracking of indicators including divorce filings and DUIs, and workshops disseminating friendly workplace practices.

Sarah Brummett, director of the OSP, acknowledges that gauging the effects of such a broad initiative will be challenging. Depending on your cast of mind, it may seem quixotic — or grittily ambitious. "A lot of work has to happen before anyone has reached the point of crisis," Brummett says. "You can't just focus resources on identifying people at risk and getting them to care. There's so much happening at the social and ecological level."

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In his landmark 1897 study Suicide, French sociologist Émile Durkheim famously identifies a species of suicide arising from insufficient social integration — the extent to which individuals coalesce, through mutually reinforcing bonds, into a collaborative society. Inadequate integration, he says, creates excessive individualism and, ultimately, "egoistic suicide." Durkheim writes, "The more weakened the groups to which [the individual] belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself." Master of his destiny, he neither relies on his neighbor nor owes that neighbor anything in return. In a society shaped by such thinking, Durkheim continues, "the incidents of private life which seem the direct inspiration of suicide...are in reality only incidental causes. The individual yields to the slightest shock of circumstance because the state of society has made him a ready prey to suicide."

Excessive individualism is, of course, an American birthright and a mainstay of Western lore. One can see its influence in regional antipathy toward collective enterprises such as taxes and regulation, and it's easy to imagine how it helped the early loggers, cattlemen and miners who staked claims there with scant community to lean on. Currents persist. A pair of modern articles — one from 2002, in American Sociological Review; the other from 2013, in Sociological Perspectives — confirm previously documented low levels of social integration in the Mountain West. Noting unusually high rates of residential transience and marital instability, the authors identify the region as ripe for the kind of egoistic suicide Durkheim describes. A 2017 study by Carolyn Pepper, of the University of Wyoming, further raises the possibility of a Mountain West "culture of suicide." This might result, Pepper writes, from "an attitude that suicide is a relatively acceptable response to adversity," a belief that it is "relatively normal and perhaps inevitable" or

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"a belief that suicide is a demonstration of one's independence."

Pepper is now digging more deeply into Western individualism. "When I talk about suicide around Wyoming, people always say to me, 'It's that pull-yourselfup-by-your- bootstraps mentality," she says. I've heard this refrain too, from doctors, advocates and friends of suicide victims. "We have some preliminary data where people in the Mountain West describe their own attitudes and their cultural environment as having more of this rugged individualism compared with other parts of the country," Pepper says. Her findings suggest that Westerners are less likely than others to express emotion or to seek help for problems, and more prone to view failure to overcome obstacles without aid as a sign of weakness.

During our conversation, Pepper notes that the current national suicide rate, 13.4 per 100,000 people, is not a historic high: In the early 1930s, during the Depression, 22 out of every 100,000 Americans killed themselves. Tales of post-crash Wall Street jumpers are familiar. Less known is that suicides had risen steadily throughout the ostensibly roaring prosperity of the 1920s. Rates dropped with the New Deal, then plunged during World War II. "Social disturbances and great popular wars rouse collective sentiments," Durkheim writes. "As they force men to close ranks and confront the common danger, the individual thinks less of himself and more of the common cause."

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In 1987 Tony Daranyi married Barclay Smith, an artist and teacher he'd met soon after moving to Telluride. About 10 years later, they both read the cult environmental novel Ishmael and were inspired to start an organic farm. They bought land in Norwood, a small rural community about 30 miles from Telluride. At the end of a long driveway off a county road, they built a house of straw bale. They raise poultry, hogs, goats and bees. In the last years of Tom Slocum's life, Daranyi invited him to parties at the farm, but Slocum always declined. I arrive on a bright, warm August evening. Chicken marengo cooks on the stovetop in a stylishly rustic kitchen. Through a window, Daranyi points to an irrigation pond that is perilously low; the region is enduring perhaps its driest summer on record. The pastures are sere and fawn. Wildfires throughout the West often haze blue skies, making the air pungent with smoke.



San Miguel County, home to Telluride, has seen more than its share of suicides.

Before dinner, we sit down to talk in a sunny office. Against one wall, shelves hold a diverse collection of books, including several on writing. Daranyi has recently been working on an essay, trying to come to terms with events that threaten his native optimism. "This winter was a bust," he says, referring to a season of meager snowfall that bruised local businesses. "The water situation. All summer we've had smokefilled skies." The Mountain West has always relied on nature — for minerals, timber, lift tickets. Amid the region's vast empty spaces, the vagaries of weather and soil have doubtless helped foster instability. But recent conditions can feel siege-like. "We live politically in a challenging time," Daranyi says. "The current political agenda and what we've been trying to do here are at odds."

"I've had three good friends die this summer," Daranyi says. Two accidents, one suicide. "Life's tough. It didn't used to seem to be."

Back in August 2016, I had talked with Daranyi by phone about Slocum's death. Up to a point, their journeys had been closely entwined. Daranyi wondered aloud about what separates resilience from despair: "To lose a friend to suicide leaves you with a lot of questions and soul searching: What path was he headed on? Am I on that path?" There were differences, of course. Daranyi got married and had children. Winters, he works ski patrol — a fraternity of conscientious jocks that one member describes to me as providing a kind of therapy. After Slocum's death, Daranyi started listening closely for signs of distress among friends. In addition to being county coroner, Sante, a ski patrol buddy, is chief paramedic for the Telluride fire district; Daranyi does wellness checks for him. For now, even in drought, Daranyi has the farm. I ask if he's given more thought to how his path differs from Slocum's. "I don't have an answer to that question yet," he says.

I meet Laurel Robinson, Daranyi and Slocum's former roommate, at her office above a bookstore in Telluride. In good weather, the town is almost comically picturesque. American flags hang from well-kept brick buildings housing galleries, cafés, restaurants and boutiques. The crowd is lively, tan and fit. The Range Rovers drive slowly, and middleaged men don pink pants without evident selfconsciousness. Real estate has been booming more or less since the mid-1980s, and median home values now approach $1 million. Tom Cruise, Oprah Winfrey and Ralph Lauren have Telluride estates. But beyond Main Street, the houses — handsome, unpretentious, attended by gardeners — are often deserted, the second, third or fourth homes of owners who mostly live elsewhere. Many year-round residents have been exiled to cheaper towns such as Norwood, sometimes an hour or more away.

In a cluttered office outfitted with a Mac monitor, Robinson, executive director of the

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annual Telluride Wine Festival, sifts through the fallout from this year's event. The money isn't adding up, and she's fielding peevish complaints. In an earlier era, she says, Telluride's many festivals —largely musical— were facilitated by a culture of volunteerism. Friends and friends of friends would work for tickets. "Now there's no time," she says. "People have to work so much in order to live here." For unmoneyed newcomers, the barriers to entry are prohibitive. "People with great aspirations come and think, I'm going to do whatever I need to make it work," Daranyi says. "And then they think, Oh my God, this is too difficult. It seems like people are coming and going all the time."

For those who came to Telluride in its undiscovered state, the sense can be of water rising. "That's why I have three jobs," says Emil Sante, who has lived here for decades. "It weighs on you financially, psychologically." Todd Creel, who had the good sense to go into real estate early on, says of Slocum, "He was very opinionated about politics and ethics, the environment and Telluride as a community." Its transformation grated. "The dynamic changed, and the values changed. That was hard for him. It was hard for a lot of people." When it comes to income disparity, San Miguel is the nation's eighth-most-unequal county, according to a 2018 study by the nonprofit Economic Policy Institute. (Wyoming's Teton County and Colorado's Pitkin County rank first and seventh, respectively.) Amid such evolution, friction is inevitable. But unhappiness among the old guard often arises less from class resentment than from the fracture of their community.

After a divorce, Robinson lost her Telluride condo. "I can't buy something else in town," she says between bites of a late lunch of quiche. "I don't have as many friends, and it's harder to get together with them, because I'm in Norwood. Things pass me by." Ski burns and potlucks have died out, vestiges of a once tight-knit colony. I ask Robinson about those days. "What's really weird is I'll have these Tom flashbacks," she says. There was the time she planted a garden. "Tom came out and watched me. He asked all these questions about the flowers, like he'd never been in a yard before. I can see his face so clearly now, whenever I'm planting." Another time, on a rafting trip, she got doused by rapids, and Slocum warmed her on a riverside rock, warding off hypothermia she hadn't even noticed setting in.

Robinson has known several people who killed themselves in the area, and she wonders about common threads. "I have contemplated suicide a number of times myself," she says. "I look at myself and go, What makes me like Tom?" Stereotypes about suicide victims seldom include athletes and outdoorsmen, but people who have staked their identities and relationships on physicality can be unusually vulnerable to the erosions of age.

"People do stuff together around here: tennis, hiking, biking, skiing," Robinson says. Friendships almost invariably revolve around outdoor activity, and Achilles tendon injuries have lately kept her from participating. "You tend to get separated from your tribe when you can't keep up. And you go, Well, maybe I've got no place in the tribe anymore. It's kind of like in the wild."

Suicidality, which encompasses everything from suicidal ideation to the completed act, is a continuum — a fact often emphasized by prevention advocates. Suicidal thoughts are common, but few people act on them. Of those who do and survive, a majority do not die by suicide, which is to say they resolve to live. Paul Reich, a program manager with Mental Health Colorado and a vocal advocate for affordable housing, tells me, "Any time you're in a community that has housing that's not stable, it creates a high-stress situation." Colorado is substantially populated by people from elsewhere who have left friends and family behind. "More than half of Telluride's workers come from outside the county," Reich says. "You spend your days here, but your nights in, say, Montrose," which is 65 miles away. "You're not really connected to either of them. There's a lack of a support network, the connections that help people get through difficult times."

Yet local suicide prevention remains largely focused on crisis. When I ask Robinson what she thinks about available mental health resources, she looks exasperated. She does not consider suicide by definition irrational; being assured in a moment of crisis that her life is precious doesn't move her. Like all of us, she wants to sense, from her surroundings, that her existence means something. I ask what she does when she feels down. "I call Tony," she says, chuckling through tears. There's something flintily calming about Daranyi. He has the unhurried manner of a cabinetmaker, and his optimism isn't cloying. He's calling his new essay "The Glass Is Half Full."

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In a note written before his death, Tom Slocum referred to his physical decline. He indicated he would face his end on his own terms. Like most suicide notes, it offered friends and family no closure.

At the suggestion of Slocum's brother Steve, I look up some of Tom's writing in a local paper, where, over the years, he published several letters and op-ed pieces. What comes through is a man troubled by political partisanship and concerned about his community: backcountry protocol, gun control, mountain sports safety.

By April 2015, when he published his last item, he'd become reclusive. Friends say that he'd stopped taking care of himself, his hair gone long and greasy, and that he'd become bitter, unresponsive to overtures even from close friends. But the piece — strange and expansive, proceeding to a dreamy, metaphoric, melancholic denouement — has nothing bitter in it. Slocum describes being on the Colorado, a river he loves, negotiating rapids whose names he knows well. A current of fear, about his own fate and others', riffles the surface; he ponders "an American West where supply of firearms is guaranteed while access to life- giving water seems far less assured." Conditions are beyond his control. He hopes for the best: "The gorge narrows. The current quickens.... I hope for a confluence of currents in calm, pacific waters as I lever oar blades deep into the murk, feel the forces in play, then I brace for cold, harsh spray from the rapids. And I remind all to stay on the high side of the boat, until she slides up the smooth sandy surface of the beach."



Laurel Robinson witnessed Telluride evolve into a resort area.

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"I'll catch up with you three later."

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FAR FROM HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

For one young adventurer, reconnecting with the spirit of the season was simple—it just took a bicycle, two hemispheres and 7,000 miles

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Sitting outside a crusty hostel in Ecuador, smoking cigarettes with some Argentinean backpackers, I found that I couldn't locate the Big Dipper in the night sky. It was August 2014, and I was a year into a 16-month cycling journey from Oregon to Patagonia, the other side of the world from my hometown of Los Angeles.

BY **JEDIDIAH JENKINS**

I asked my companions to help me find the Dipper, and they in turn asked, "What is that?" I thought maybe South Americans called it something else, so I drew it on a napkin. They looked at me with confusion.

"I've never seen that," one of them said.

"But it's the most obvious constellation in the sky," I protested.

"No it's not. The Southern Cross is."

"What's the Southern Cross?"

Their expressions changed from confusion to shock. One of them grabbed another napkin and drew a kite shape with a rogue star in the upper right. He pointed up and there it was, as big and commanding as the Dipper. (I should add that the Big Dipper and the Southern Cross are asterisms, not constellations, but no one talks like that.) It was in this moment that it really landed on me: We live on a giant sphere, and where we stand on it affects what we see.

When I stargaze from my home in Los Angeles, I'm looking a specific direction into the universe — up, if you will. In the southern hemisphere, they're looking down. They've spent their lives gazing in another direction, at stars I'd never seen. Being away from the Big Dipper, as absurd as it sounds, left me feeling untethered. This anchor in the sky, a constant in my world, was not a guarantee. I had moved beyond its view. I had left it behind.

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When my world is right-side up, I see October let go of all her leaves. Halloween hits, and then Thanksgiving is bubbling in the dining room, and when that epic meal is over we turn on the news to watch early-bird shoppers stampede into Best Buy. Then the holiday season is in full swing and every day is a bit colder. (Yes, I live in snowless Los Angeles, but when I think of the holidays I think of my childhood home of Nashville, where there's enough snow to conjure the appropriate Christmas nostalgia.) After the presents are opened, you have just a second to catch your breath before New Year's Day. And it's over. The year ends in an ever- accelerating slide.

The holiday season is a mixed bag. It can be terrible — an inescapable hell with the family who hurt you, or a painful reminder of a lack of family. If you're lucky, a swell of love and good cheer takes over, a feeling of the year's completion and the promise of renewal. I've been one of the lucky ones: For me, the holidays are about finding perfect gifts for my parents, lounging by the fire, taking forest walks and overeating.

What goes unnoticed is the stage on which it is all set: the hemisphere in which you happen to live. In the northern hemisphere, the year comes to a close in the winter. The shortening of the days. The chilled air. The first snow. The Christmas movies and songs full of wintry scenes. There's a necessary coziness that accompanies the cold: You have to huddle together, maybe with some good food. And maybe we all start singing a song everyone knows.

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Previous pages: El Chaltén, Argentina. **Above:** Jenkins charts his course in San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina (left). His cycling rig on the outskirts of Futaleufú, Chile (middle and right).

November 2014 in Patagonia, however, was unlike anything I'd experienced before. I woke up on Thanksgiving in the tiny town of Puerto Río Tranquilo. It was warm outside; summer was coming. There were about three hostels and a cluster of maybe 30 houses. That's it. I was the only English speaker except for an Italian traveler who saw my bicycle and wanted to talk about the cyclist's life. But I wasn't having it. He didn't know it was Thanksgiving. No one did.

I was 6,000 miles from the United States, on the bottom of the planet, in a place that saw the fourth Thursday of November as any other day. The child inside me, expecting family and friends and a huge meal — and perhaps my mom saying "Go around the table and say what you're thankful for"— was all alone and sad. I had none of those things. And it wasn't even fall; it was bright green spring.

In an effort to create my own holiday cheer, I sat at the only café in town and wrote out everything I was thankful for in my journal. The list consisted almost entirely of the people in my life. Writing their names made them feel closer. With me. Then I had to pack up, strap my shit onto my bike yet again and cycle down the gravel road with not a soul by my side.

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There was no Black Friday, no rush for Christmas presents; there was only gravel road. Instead of pillowy snow, there was grass, lush with flowers exploding with color.

As I rode south, approaching my final destination of El Chaltén, Argentina, I thought about the meaning of the holidays. December had accrued a number of traditions of my own devising: I would always make a playlist of old Christmas music, such as Bing Crosby and Nat King Cole and the Charlie Brown Christmas soundtrack. I would have people over for a potluck and show off my compilation. We'd light the fire pit, hang in my backyard and wear out my list.

Then I would fly back to Nashville. The leafless world and brisk air greeted me. I could always depend on that one house to go all the way with giant inflated snowmen and Santa. I'd have a big Christmas with my mother and sibling before driving down to have a quiet one with my father. He is near impossible to shop for because he seems so content, so I'd just bring him a hug and my undivided attention. This constellation of memories and rituals created an expectation. A predictable comfort. An order in the universe. Everyone behaves in such a way in my usual wintry world, and I like it.

You know something best when it's taken from you. Cycling alone through the first week of December and then the second, my mind was knotted. The sky stayed light until 10 ¢.£. Snow was still thick on the top of the mountains, but the sun was scorching. There was the occasional Christmas decoration at a hostel, but otherwise it could have been April.

Of course, total immersion in a new setting is not an option in the age of Instagram. I knew very well what month it was and what was, traditionally, supposed to be happening in my life. I could see, in real time, friends and family decorating their homes and having Christmas parties. I was handed my old world in my phone, and then, on looking up, I was reminded of my incredible distance from it.

In the second week of December, as I neared El Chaltén and the end of my journey, I finished my day of biking next to a raging river. I pushed through some trees, found a soft splash of grass, set up my tent and went to bathe in the river. It was aqua blue, which I assumed meant it came directly from the mouth of a glacier. Upon touching it, I experienced a paralyzing cold. I stripped down and dipped my body in the water, hopped out shouting to the sky, then lathered myself up and jumped back in.

As I dried my shivering body, I looked at the bank of the river and its billion white and gray polished stones. There, at my feet, was a piece of driftwood about the size of a shoe. Some kind of wood-eating worm had carved the most intricate maze into it — a perfectly spaced tangle of lines like the winding folds of a brain. And in that moment, I thought of my dad. He'll love this, I said to myself.

I wrapped it in a T-shirt and put it in my bag. I wanted it to embody the bigness and jagged beauty of Patagonia — a piece of wood from the bank of a river, unseen by anyone, grown from a tree neither he nor I would ever see. Maybe no human would ever see it, but it held all the Christmas I could gather for myself so far south. Night fell, and I looked past the trees above my tent to the sky above. A cloudless sky, the Southern Cross high and obvious above me.

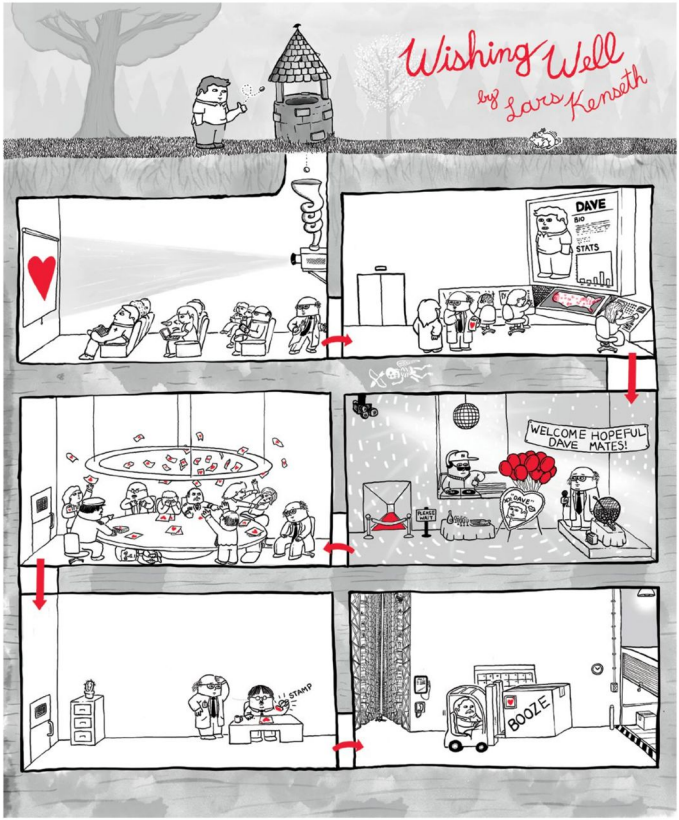
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The foreign stars, the summer air, had given me two gifts: a piece of wood for my father and a distant view of my holidays. I saw them for the first time.

On December 22, I flew home. As the plane dipped below the clouds above Nashville, I saw the familiar winter world I had yearned for. I was picked up from the airport, and when I got out of the car, the freezing cold hit my skin. Christmas, my kind of Christmas, was here.

That night I went outside into the night sky. And there it was, the Big Dipper, cartoonishly framed in another opening of trees, as if to say, "I never left. You did."

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GABRIELLA COSTA

Photography by **MOSAAB ALSARAY @MOSAABALSARAYART**
Make-up by **MICHAEL KAIROS @MK_BEAUTYSALON** *Text by* **NELLY MADUNA**
Location **BOSTON, MA**

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Tell us something surprising about you?
I moved to New York specifically to get more opportunities in the modeling industry. I am originally from the outskirts of Boston, MA, but made the big risky move five months ago, and I can't say that I regret it at all.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
I was so excited to shoot with Playboy. To be published in Playboy has been a dream of mine since I was so much younger. It's crazy that dreams really can turn to reality.

What inspires you?
The work ethic of my father. He is a self-made successful man who comes from humble beginnings. I've always aspired to take on some of his traits to find my own success.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modelling?
I actually wasn't the one who started my journey in modelling, my beautiful mother did in second grade. She brought me to open calls and I walked down a runway and got called in to be part of an agency in elementary school.

Who do you look up to in the modelling industry?
Ashley Graham. I look up to her so much in life and modelling wise. She promotes self-love, confidence, positivity, and she has this radiantly beautiful aura about her. Looking up to her has also helped me within my own shoots.

What are some of your hobbies?
Singing, writing music, cooking, and just coming home and enjoying a bubble bath with lit candles while listening to my carefully selected playlists.

Turn-ons
A well-groomed and well-dressed man, also something about a hardworking man in a suit really sends shivers down my spine.

Turn-offs
If someone doesn't take care of themselves it's not going to work. Also, someone who doesn't have ambition or drive can be a turn off, although that depends on the case.

Describe to us your perfect date
My perfect date is honestly so simple. I'm not too high maintenance. I really just like to get to know the person on the first date. So, just driving around listening to music mixes and talking and seeing if we mesh well is the best.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
Madrid. There is amazing culture, art, a fun and vibrant nightlife scene, and good food.

What is your mantra?
"When in doubt don't." Whether it's saying something, buying, or just doing something in general, if within my judgement it feels wrong, I don't do it.

Follow more of Gabriella's adventures on Instagram @iamgabriellacosta

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CHARLIE COX

In a world where Marvel is king and privacy all but dead, the man behind Daredevil tells us why it's important to remain, if just for now, masked

Q1: *Do you find it's a struggle to be on a popular Marvel show and at the same time try to maintain your private life?*
COX: It hink I've m anaged to keep my private life very private. That wasn't born out of any intense feelings toward privacy, though I think it's quite normal and natural to want to be able to have a private life. I think it's partly due to the fact that I don't engage in social media. I also don't think I entirely trust myself with social media. I wouldn't want to have a bad day and end up tweeting something without having really thought it through. You can't take that back.
Q2: *What else don't you like about social media?*
COX: It's just not in my DNA. Occasionally someone will show me Ryan Reynolds's handle. He maintains his privacy, but he's very funny, and he says some interesting stuff. I guess he kind of gets it right; he knows exactly how to manage it. I read an interview years ago — I think it was with Matt Damon, who said that he doesn't like doing interviews. He tries to do as few interviews as possible, because he doesn't really want people to get to know who he is as a person; it might make it harder for them to believe him as his character. I remember thinking, That's a really good point.
Q3: *You've worked with some superb actors over the years — women in particular, including Claire Danes, Kate Mara and Krysten Ritter. Have you ever fallen in love with a co-star?*
COX: Yeah, many times.
Q4: *Can you tell us about that?*
COX: No! [laughs] Look, that was probably one of the humbling experiences of my 20s — beautiful actresses I'd fallen in love with. Spend enough time googling me and you'll probably find a list of a few of them.
Q5: *Is it complicated to be involved withsomeone who is also an actor on-set with you?*
COX: Yes. You're in some weird location where you don't know anyone else. You're all there, you're making this movie, and if you're costars, you're pretending to be in love during the day. It's not surprising that people confuse reality. Often, I think, when you do have these on-set romances and then you get back to the real world, suddenly you begin to see it wasn't quite what you thought it was. I think that's why you get so many actors dating one another: It's nice to be with somebody who understands what the job is like.
Q6: *Your fiancée, Samantha Thomas, is a producer on Iron Fist and Jessica Jones but not Daredevil. How did you guys meet?*
COX: Yeah, so she's a producer. I'm not going to talk about her at all, because one thing I'm very careful about is keeping my family out of it. That's one of the reasons I'm not on social media. I really don't think people need to know about my family.
Q7: *We're not going to ask about your sex life, because you're not going to tell us. So what's something no one has ever asked you that you wish people would?*
COX: I don't know if I've ever heard that question before. The truth is, for someone like me, I don't feel comfortable talking about myself in any way that's going to then be put on camera or in print or something. But I recognize

BY **MEREDITH ALLOWAY** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JAKE CHESSUM**





MAYBE IT'S BEING ENGLISH, BUT I BECOME HORRIFIED BY A COMPLIMENT.

that part of my job is to publicize the stuff that I do. I also know that no one is going to read an interview where all I talk about is what it was like to play the character. It's a balance, and you have to try to figure out what is appropriate and what isn't.

Q8: *Do you imagine sacrificing your career for your family?*

COX: Oh, 100 percent. My career is not more important than my family. No, there's nothing more important than family. Go to any hospital or old people's home and find me someone who will answer the question "What would you do differently?" with "I wish I'd worked harder." No. Everyone would say, "I wish I'd made more time for my family."

Q9: *What were you like as a kid?*

COX: I'm the youngest of five by 10 years; the closest sibling to me is 10 years older. So I'm a total mistake, effectively. I was an only child and I wasn't, if that makes sense. My dad was a publisher and my mom worked for him, in London. I was obsessed with sport — football.

Q10: *Which team do you root for?*

COX: I'm an Arsenal fan. There's a great line in one of my favorite films, an Argentinean film called The Secret in Their Eyes. They're looking for a criminal and they say something like "When you're on the run, you can change everything about you. You can change your look, you can change the way you live, you can change the people you hang out with, you can change anything you need to. The one thing you can never change is your passions." And they end up finding this guy because they look for him at his football team's stadium. You can't choose what you're passionate about. Sometimes I think, How am I wasting this time and energy and suffering these devastating losses that ruin days — over a game?





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But you just can't help it. For my bachelor party, my best friend was like, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "I just want to go to the park with my best mates, put sweaters down and play."

Q11: *If you were obsessed with sports when you were growing up, when did your artistic side come out?*

COX: If I think about it, it was a lways there. I always enjoyed engaging in the theater. We did a play at one of my schools when I was seven or eight years old. It was Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, and I played Charlie. I don't know if we've lost the tape, but if you watch it, as well as knowing my own lines, I'm mouthing everyone else's lines.

Q12: *Many people say your breakout role was in Stardust, but we remember you in Casanova with Heath Ledger, which came before Stardust, right?*

COX: Yeah, but I don't think anyone would refer to that as a breakout role. [laughs] What you don't even remember is that I did a Shakespeare movie, The Merchant of Venice, with Al Pacino and Jeremy Irons before that. I'll tell you something: In the first part of the movie, we were all in Luxembourg, and Pacino — I can't remember how he phrased it, but he said to me, "Do you have a leather jacket?" And I was like, "No." He was like, "If you're an actor, you have to have a leather jacket." Later, my mom and dad asked me, "What do you want for Christmas?" And I said, "A leather jacket." I still have it. A bunch of my friends are still really jealous of it.

Q13: *And who are your friends? Who do you hang out with?*

COX: My dear, dear, dear friends aren't actors. My dear friends are my friends from school. The guy who is going to be my best man, my best friend — our parents were friends before we were born. I've become friends with people like Eddie Redmayne, but you know, I don't see them regularly at all. They're out doing something, or I'm doing something. Ben Barnes is in Stardust, so we met on that. He's one of the loveliest humans I've ever met —and he's also been in my life a huge amount because he's now on one of the Netflix shows that shoot in New York. I found him an apartment in my building, because he lives in Los Angeles. So for two years, he's been living underneath us.

Q14: *What was it like working with Krysten Ritter on The Defenders?*

COX: I love Krysten. I can't say enough good things about her. And she and I, in particular, got along really well. She's unapologetically who she is, and I learned a lot from that. Not in any way does she apologize for being successful and talented.

Q15: *Do you apologize for those things?*

COX: I think I do. Maybe it's being English, but I become horrified by a compliment. You know that feeling when someone says something wonderful to you — "Oh my God, you're great," or something like that? My instinct is to say, "No, I'm not." It's very difficult for me. I think I was brought up to not be boastful or a show-off, and what I'm learning from people like Krysten is that being authentic and being proud of who you are and what you do is not the same thing as being boastful. So one of my practices as a human is to try and be rightsized, if that makes sense.

Q16: *Is it difficult dealing with fans at conventions like Comic-Con, knowing that compliments make you uncomfortable?*

VULNERABILITY, FORGIVENESS AND KINDNESS SHOULD BE WHAT MAKE A SUPERHERO A SUPERHERO.

COX: I have to say, one of the great things about playing this character is that I've had the opportunity to go to loads of conventions and meet loads of fans, and I love that. The fans are so respectful. I haven't had a bad experience to date. You get to hear what people have to say about the show — people who have no agenda in telling you that they like something. And again, I still manage to lead a very private life. In my day-to-day life I seem to be anonymous.

Q17: *The new season of Daredevil keeps getting darker and darker. There are a lot of rumors about the Born Again Daredevil story arcs for the coming seasons. How do you feel about playing Daredevil in an arc that compares him to Jesus?*

COX: I guess what your question makes me think of is that this character has his faith: He has a very strong attachment to his God, to his Catholicism. And yet what he engages in as a superhero runs in direct conflict with those ideas. One of the great gifts of playing this character is to enjoy that feeling of being torn in different directions. We play on the idea that the character gives up the Matt Murdock element of his life and starts to engage with the idea that it's make- believe — that Matt Murdock is the character he's invented, and the true him, his true authentic self, is Daredevil, which is a dangerous path to tread.

Q18: *Do you ever feel as though you're losing yourself in the role?*

COX: No. I know that Sam jokes about when she has to live with Matt Murdock for six months. I know that it can affect your moods, but some of that is because of fatigue and your body aching 24/7. I've played this character for so many hours now — it's not like a movie.

Q19: *Daredevil seems to be a very vulnerable character. Do you consider yourself to be a vulnerable person?*

COX: The short answer is yes. The truth is in real life, in my heart — and this may sound naive — but I don't believe violence is the answer to anything. I don't think there needs to be, or should be in an ideal world, any level of violence to try to solve any problems. One of the things you commented on, which we try to do with the show and I try to do with Matt, is really highlight the moments when the answer is not violence but vulnerability, forgiveness and kindness — characteristics that really, ultimately, hopefully should be what make a superhero a superhero. What makes a superhero is the ability to make the right judgment call in the right moment, the ability to not engage in violence when it's not absolutely necessary.

Q20: *In what ways do you think playing Daredevil has changed you?*

COX: One of the things I like about Matt Murdock is that he doesn't worry about what other people think. He doesn't feel people's feelings for them. He's very comfortable telling them exactly how it is, and he lets other people have their own feelings around it. And that's something that, at times, makes him seem quite cold. But actually, a very respectful way to live is to not try to influence how people experience a conversation or a challenging difference you might have. I'm trying to take that onboard a little bit as myself, as Charlie — to speak my truth and let people have their experience around that. ■

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NANNETTE HAMMOND

Photography by **BRUCE COLERO** *Text by* **NELLY MADUNA**



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Were you exited to shoot for Playboy?
Ever since I was a little girl and I stumbled on my father's Playboy Collection, I have dreamt of having being in a Playboy pictorial.

Tell us something surprising about you.
I am a mother of six kids, and live a real Barbie life! I even have a pink Barbie convertible!

Describe yourself in one sentence.
I am a very sensual, extremely loyal, family-first, feisty Italian woman!

What are some of your hobbies?
Fast cars, cleaning my house naked, shopping, and selfies!

Turn-ons
Turn-ons include muscular men that smell and look good!

Turn-offs
Turn-offs include rude, cocky men that don't know how to treat a Barbie Queen.

Describe your perfect date.
A perfect date would be with a gentleman that pampers me with genuineness. And, feeds me a great steak/lobster followed by great sex!

Biggest challenge as a model so far?
Traveling around the world for photo-shoots and raising six kids is a huge challenge. But it is fun!

Any last words you would like to share with our readers?
I would like to thank all of my social media fans for supporting me and liking my pictures and videos. They energize me to do more! Thank you!




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A VERY '80S SEX SCANDAL

BY **DAVID HOCHMAN**



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*With The Front Runner, **Jason Reitman** and **J.K. Simmons** revisit the downfall of philandering presidential candidate Gary Hart. (Oh, how times have changed!)*

Director Jason Reitman knows that most of us have a way of misremembering history. We collectively believe Humphrey Bogart said "Play it again, Sam" in Casablanca (the line is "Play it, Sam") and that the beloved ursine family is called the Berenstein Bears when it's actually the Berenstain Bears. This is known as the Mandela effect, named after the persistent internet claims that African leader Nelson Mandela died in prison in the 1980s when in fact he lived until 2013.

We have committed the same historical mangling with 1988 Democratic presidential nominee Gary Hart, the subject of Reitman's provocative new biopic, The Front Runner. It's commonly accepted that a photo of former beauty-pageant winner Donna Rice sitting on Hart's lap aboard the yacht Monkey Business
forced the charismatic Colorado senator to cancel his White House run in May 1987. In fact, the National Enquirer published the picture weeks after the Miami Herald and The Washington Post had already exposed the married father of two as an adulterer.

That's one reason 41-year-old Reitman, born in Canada to Ghostbusters director Ivan Reitman and actress Geneviève Deloir, thinks the story deserves another look. "Gary Hart is an almost perfect conversation piece in that he's a reflection of the public," says Reitman. "Hart forces you to ask, What flaws am I willing to put up with in my leaders? When are private matters a public concern? What information should we trust in making decisions about our candidates?"

A 2016 Radiolab podcast brought the story to Reitman's attention; his film is based on the 2014 book All the Truth Is Out: The Week Politics Went Tabloid by journalist Matt Bai, who cowrote the screenplay. The Front Runner stars Hugh Jackman as the well-coiffed politician and J.K. Simmons, Oscar winner and frequent Reitman collaborator, as Hart's put-upon campaign chief. Rounding out the principal cast are Sara Paxton as Rice (who now goes by Donna Rice Hughes) and Vera Farmiga as Lee Hart, Gary's wife. The trio of recent projects on the subject and the caliber of the Front Runner cast suggest a growing desire to measure Hart's era against our own.

Depending on your perspective, the scandal was the moment American politics either got real or rode off the rails. It was certainly the first time the sex life of a presidential candidate had come under public scrutiny, and one could argue it's a forebear to current #MeToo coverage: a powerful man undone practically overnight by highly publicized accusations of sexual misconduct.

"Before Hart, it was all wink, wink, nudge, nudge, from LBJ and Kennedy on down," says Simmons. "Thirty years later, you look at what presidents have been involved with in terms of their sexual peccadilloes, and suddenly, having a party on a boat or a lady visiting your condo seems quite tame in comparison to what has happened under the desk in the Oval Office."

Few debate whether Hart was an ingenious statesman with the potential for greatness. His views on national security all but predicted the 9/11 attacks, and he advocated early on for a shift in the U.S. economy from industry to digital technology. If Hart had avoided disgrace and made it to the White House, would his infidelity have made a difference in how he led the country? The question fascinates Reitman: "This is a story about human beings who are nuanced and complicated and flawed, and at the end of the day, that's politics. When you elect someone, you elect a person with flaws, and that's as true today as it ever was. We have the most flawed human being of all time in the presidency."

Having a set loaded with 1980s Americana — brick-size cell phones, velour tracksuits, Grand Wagoneers — helped conjure the zeitgeist. "The ephemera all brings a human connection to those days," Reitman says. But the truest test of how The Front Runner holds up to the historical record came when Reitman showed the film to Donna Rice Hughes and the Harts (albeit at separate screenings).

"Donna was pleased to be portrayed as more than the blonde bimbo cheerleader so many people assumed she was," Reitman says. Hughes graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of South Carolina; today she advocates for internet safety and protecting children online. As for Hart, he returned to law in 1988, earned a doctorate in politics from Oxford University and wrote several books. After many hard times and two separations, Gary and Lee recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Perhaps it's no surprise that, of all Reitman's subjects, it was Hart himself who stopped the director in his tracks.

"As you can imagine, showing Gary the film was the scariest screening experience of my life," Reitman says. "We all went for hot chocolates afterward, and the first thing he asked was 'Is that really how I talk?' Lee looked at him and said, 'Yes, Gary, that's exactly how you talk.' I started breathing again after that." ■



Step on it: Hugh Jackman as Senator Hart.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY **JUSTIN METZ**

HERITAGE

SHEP *and the* FAB FOUR

When PLAYBOY sent humorist Jean Shepherd to interview the Beatles, he walked away unimpressed. As this never-before-seen conversation shows, time did not dilute his views

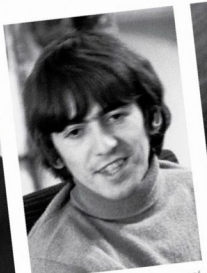
BY JIM GEORGE



PAUL: We'd be idiots to say it isn't a constant inspiration to be making a lot of money. It is to anyone. Why do business tycoons stay tycoons?



RINGO: We used to get in the car, and I'd look over at John and say, "Christ, you're a bloody phenomenon!" and laugh—'cause it was only him.

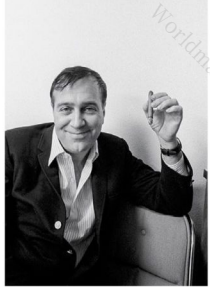


GEORGE: Ringo and I are gettin' married to each other. But that's a thing you better keep a secret. People would probably think we're queers.



JOHN: If you say you're not religious, people assume you'r antireligious. We're not su what we are, but we're mo agnostic than atheistic.





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Previous page: Jean Shepherd's travels with the Beatles resulted in the February 1965 Playboy Interview. **Left:** Frenzied fans at a 1964 Beatles concert. **Above:** Shepherd co-wrote and narrated A Christmas Story, which was based on his humor writing (see Shep Tales, opposite).

Tucked among the considerable credits of the late and legendary writer Jean Shepherd — radio shows, TV programs, short stories, books, perennial film favorite A Christmas Story — sits one entry that has remained largely overlooked: his February 1965 Playboy Interview with the Beatles. The writer-storytellerbroadcaster, credited today with inspiring talents from Jerry Seinfeld to Tom Wolfe, got the plum assignment of traveling with and interviewing the musicians during their fall 1964 tour of the U.K., observing Beatlemania up close and from both sides of the curtain.

While the Hammond, Indiana native would go on to have a rich history with the magazine, penning two dozen short stories over nearly two decades and winning an unprecedented four Playboy Writing Awards, in 1964 Shepherd was an odd choice to interview the world's biggest band. For starters, his heart was not that of a rock-and-roller but of a jazzman. Indeed, Shepherd had collaborated with Charles Mingus on the musician's 1957 album The Clown, improvising a spoken-word narration for the title track. Furthermore, Shepherd cultivated an apparent disdain for mainstream music, which the Beatles had taken over. The dynamic between author and subject was what the Brits would call chalk and cheese.

Yet the interview he filed was historic: It presented the Beatles in an adult forum, arguably for the first time. Religion, sex, homosexuality, transexuality, money, royalty — the Beatles touched on plenty of mature topics, though mostly via wisecracks. The language used was hardly the gentle fare found in the fawning teen mags of which the Beatles were a staple; you would not find, for instance, Ringo saying "tits" in 16 magazine.

Seventeen years after the interview had come out, Shepherd was promoting his latest story collection, A Fistful of Fig Newtons, which had excerpted. It was 1982, and I was a freelance reporter curious about the new book when I interviewed Shepherd for my local newspaper, the Reading Eagle. A fter a fairly lengthy discussion of humor writing, he asked if there was anything else I wanted to know. I jumped at the opportunity to go off-topic and quiz him about his Beatles Playboy Interview.

Since exaggeration, which Shepherd once described as "telescoping an experience," was an integral part of his modus operandi, it's not surprising that some of his responses were seasoned with overstatement. What he remembered as his "six-week" adventure with the Beatles was probably closer to two weeks. Likewise, the extent to which the musicians were aware of Shepherd before his assignment is debatable; only two of his stories had been published in prior to his Beatles tag-along.

Forthcoming with his recollections of being on the road with the band and adamant in his assertions, unpopular though they may be, Shepherd was nothing if not quotable. That portion of our 1982 conversation remained entirely unpublished — until now.

JIM GEORGE: Your interview with the Beatles was your first for, right?

JEAN SHEPHERD: That was the only Playboy Interview I ever did, and it was only because the Beatles requested me. I wasn't a fan one way or the other. I thought it would be interesting. I did it really as a favor to an editor at.

GEORGE: So they were aware of your work?

SHEPHERD: Sure, they read. See, if you have this idea that they were like great gods or something, well, you don't know my stature then. You have to understand that the Beatles thought of me as every bit their equal. It was really Brian Epstein who asked for me. He was a shrewd guy. Playboy was at the height of it's power. It was absolutely the big in-magazine. Epstein thought being in it would give them instant stature, and he was right. Playboy was instrumental in the career of the Beatles. I traveled and lived with them on the road for about six weeks.

GEORGE: How much of that was recorded for the interview?

SHEPHERD: It was edited down from about 10 hours of tape. By the way, they were made to sound a lot funnier than they were. See, that's another part of the mythology. I think that piece set the tenor for the Beatles being funny. They actually weren't.

GEORGE: Was it doctored?

SHEPHERD: No, no. It was taking things out of context and changing them around so that you make them funny when they weren't. A lot of things were done that way, at least in Playboy, in those days. They were producing an entertainment piece; they weren't trying to do an in-depth profile of world figures. Today, of course, we look upon any words of the Beatles as, like, graven in stone. Traveling around with the Beatles like I did is one of the things that made me very cynical about fame and talent. It confirmed a lot of things

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that I thought — that the press often can either tear you to pieces, make you look like a stupid fool even if you are Albert Schweitzer, or they can make you look like an unbelievable genius if they love you. Almost all the press that followed the Beatles were unbelievable fans.

GEORGE: To clarify, they did actually say all the quotes attributed to them, but they were rearranged?

SHEPHERD: Well, they didn't say all of them. [laughs] A couple of things my editor threw in and I objected to. I said, "Jesus, they're not that funny. They didn't say that." And he said, "Oh yeah, but wouldn't it have been great if they had?"

GEORGE: You have said that no one ever interfered with your work. Here's a case where they interfered.

SHEPHERD: No, t hey didn't interfere; they added. [laughs] I didn't give a damn about it. You're the only guy that has brought this piece up.

GEORGE: You've never been asked to discuss this?

SHEPHERD: Never. For Chris sake, I lived with them for weeks; I shared a room with Ringo. When they do these eternal rehashes of the Beatles' career, the piece is never mentioned. It always surprised me, because it was the first worldwide publicity they got as persons, as personalities. That had never been done before.

GEORGE: In the Playboy Interview you said that John Lennon was "a rather cool customer, and far less hip than he's been made out to be."

SHEPHERD: It's true. I d idn't care for him. We tangled many times. He was a very, very egotistical guy, for starters. I remember one little incident. We were in Dundee, and he said, "Go down and get me a pack of cigarettes." I said, "What was that?" He said, "Go get me a pack of cigarettes." And I said, "Well, there's nothing wrong with you." He looked at me for a long time, and the lines were then drawn. See, he was used to having toadies around, and I wasn't a toady.

GEORGE: You didn't find him witty in conversation at all?

SHEPHERD: No, no. [laughs] None of 'em were, actually. My belief is that when someone becomes famous, it begins to have a life of its own. In other words, if the pope says, "It's raining," then 5,000 people say, "My God! What insight!" Just because it's the pope. And that's what I think happened with the Beatles.

GEORGE: One line you wrote about George Harrison sticks in my mind: "He's a very likable chap — if he happens to like you."

SHEPHERD: It's absolutely true. He's got all the unpredictable charm of a hooded cobra. [laughs] I got along with Ringo better than any of them. Ringo had a real sense of humor. He was truly the funniest; I don't set myself up as an expert on the Beatles, but I can tell you this. I had actual personal relationships with them. Hell, George used to call me in New York all the time when they'd come.

GEORGE: You kept in contact over the years?

SHEPHERD: Off and on, as our paths crossed. I talked to Paul a couple times. There was never any effort by me to call the Beatles. I'm not a Beatles fan.

GEORGE: In your introduction to the Playboy Interview, it seems as though you didn't see any greatness or magic. You honestly didn't see anything special in them?

SHEPHERD: There really wasn't. I think they were one of the greatest contrived media hypes of the century. I don't think they were that special.

GEORGE: Even in the later years?

SHEPHERD: Especially in the later years. [laughs] I'm not trying to put them down; I just think they were overblown. They did their thing, and they did it well. But Brian Epstein is the one that created the Beatles, not the Beatles. He could've taken four other guys and made the Beatles.

GEORGE: You actually believe that?

SHEPHERD: Oh, absolutely. I know it's sacrilegious. [laughs] But you call them the way you see them. ■

SHEP TALES

From Jean Shepherd's two dozen PLAYBOY short stories, we selected six of our early favorites



Red Ryder Nails the Hammond Kid (December 1965) You'll shoot your eye out! A Christmas Story is rooted in this yarn of one boy's attempts to become the owner of a Red Ryder BB gun.



Ollie Hopnoodle's Haven of Bliss (July 1968) Summer vacation in southern Michigan means faulty cabin wiring, relentless mosquitoes and forgotten fishing gear...in other words, heaven.



Scut Farkas and the Murderous Mariah (April 1967) Forget marbles. Top- spinning is all the rage in this schoolyard story that features our young hero challenging the local thug for "top" honors.



Banjo Butt Meets Julia Child (December 1968) Fine French cooking suddenly, shockingly, supplants the grunts' standard chow in this Army mess-hall mystery.



The Secret Mission of the Blue-Assed Buzzard (September 1967) Meant to be the first chapter in a book of Shep's Army stories, the collection never made it to print.



County Fair! (September 1969) Dirt-track races, prize-pig contests, a fortune-telling chicken—the Indiana fairgrounds have it all, including upchuck-inducing carnival rides.

Classic Cartoons



"Do you have any games that can be played in bed by two or more consenting adults?"



"Number three, let's hear you say 'Cut the Merry Christmas crap and put your wallets and watches in the bag.' "



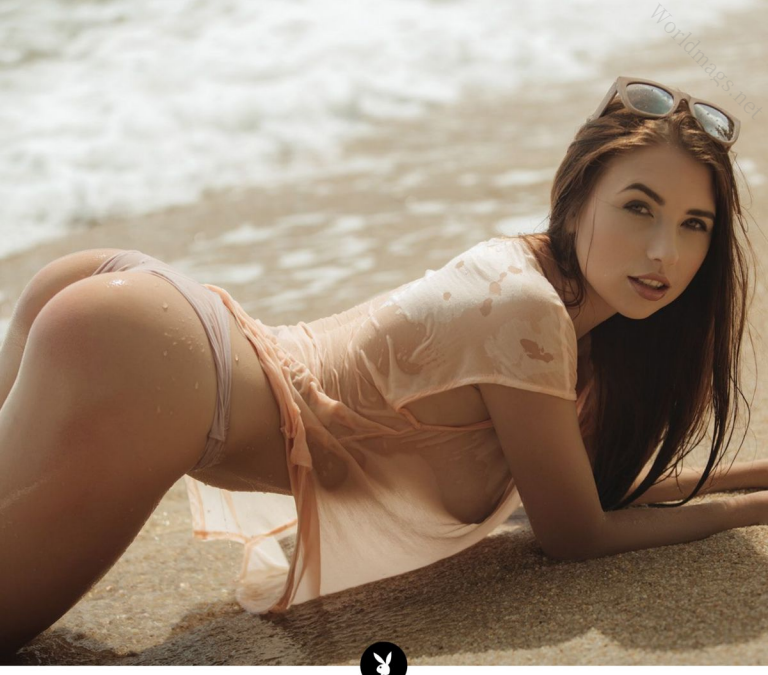
"Ah, the pomp, color and excitement of college football! What better way to spend an autumn afternoon?"



"Merciful heavens! This is no time for extended orgasms!"

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